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STILL TIME TO DIE

By the Same Author

RETREAT WITH STILLWELL

STILL TIME TO DIE

By
JACK BELDEN

"No state should believe its fate, that is, its entire existence, to be dependent on one battle, no matter how decisive it be. If it is beaten, the calling forth of fresh forces and the natural weakening which every offensive undergoes in the long run may bring about a turn of fortune, or assistance may come from abroad. There is always still time to die."

—VON CLAUSEWITZ

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STILL TIME TO DIE

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FIRST EDITION

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This book is complete and unabridged
in contents, and is manufactured in strict
conformity with Government regulations
for saving paper.

To

those politicians, statesmen and leaders of the world who either actively brought on this war or passively failed to raise a finger to prevent it; to those financiers, bankers and industrialists who armed Fascist Japan while she was in the very act of crushing poor China, and who now, in the midst of war, are still engaged in their slimy imperialist game of obtaining materials for the next war; to those leaders and their henchmen who have twisted this war into what it should not have been and who today are both consciously and unconsciously betraying the democratic will of the enslaved people of Europe and Asia

—in hate—

and to the soldiers of all nations who, as I write, are lying on the once good but now mangled and bloody earth, striving to get at each others' throats, who are staring up at the stars at night recalling their lost youth and the forgotten days of peace, who are consumed not so much with mutual hatred for each other as with their united hatred for war

—in love—

this book is dedicated.

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THE NATURE OF
THE BATTLEFIELD

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WAR," says von Clausewitz, "is a strange trinity, composed of the original violence of its essence, the hate and enmity which are to be regarded as a blind, natural impulse of the play of probabilities and chance, which make it a free activity of the emotions, and of the subordinate character of a political tool, through which it belongs to the province of pure intelligence. The first of these three sides is more particularly the concern of the people, the second that of the commander and his army and the third that of the government."

This book deals primarily only with the second of these aspects of war—with the concerns of the army—with the "play of probabilities and chance" on the battlefield. Hence it is concerned with the "free activity of the emotions."

The bodies through which these emotions breathe are variously those of the Chinese, British and American armies and that of the author himself. The scenes of action are those of China, Africa, Malta, Sicily and Italy, but they might be anywhere; for this book is concerned not with the difference of various battlefields, but with their sameness—with danger, friction, falsehood, overwhelming exertion and confused uncertainty.

For the most part, this book is about the essence of war, combat. By derivation, it is somewhat about strategy and tactics, about men and a little about women on or near the battlefield; but mostly it is about myself in the midst of battle. Therefore it is not about war as such; for battles are merely the flashing and seductive garments that hide the all-embracing body of war.

Because it is difficult to separate a part from the whole, to separate a battle from a war, the reader may, on opening this book, feel that he has been plunged into a nightmare. I should like therefore to indicate some observations I have made during the last six or seven years of war, without particularly thinking about them, on the nature of the battlefield.

I saw my first battle in July, 1937, on the Marco Polo Bridge out-

side of Peiping, China, and my last, up until the time of writing, at Salerno, Italy, where I was wounded, in September, 1943. Between those two periods I have learned much about war—enough to make me realize how little I know—but, since the first year, I have learned little of value about battle that I did not already know. For a nonparticipant, combat, over a long period of years, becomes a sort of emotional drug, first exciting, then dulling the senses and starving the imagination. Therefore, I say I have learned little of positive value from the battlefield.

I early learned that a battle has many faces and all of them are false. The falsehood, on the one hand, consists of the untruth born in the heat of battle itself—the contradictory reports, the wrong information, the doubtful rumors that shake the conviction of even the most hardened commander; and on the other hand, it consists of the lying legend about a battle that arises after it is over. No one ever knows what happened.

Which of these two aspects of untruth exercise the most influence on the course of human events is hard to say. The first belongs to the sphere of direct action wherein actual history is determined by the outcome of a battle; the second belongs to the sphere of written history and art which in turn exercise their influence on future events.

The wrong information that is born in battle in reality belongs to a sphere of higher truth. For it is a simple fact that 90 per cent of the information obtained in battle is doubtful. Unfortunate is the commander who does not recognize this. Then, either, because of inexperience, he will make wrong and fatal decisions on the basis of false information, or else, because of an unsteady psychological base, he will change his colors like a chameleon from brightest optimism to darkest despair, until, caught in the very fog of war, he gropes blindly around in indecision, does nothing and loses all power to influence events.

Falseness is a product of any battle. Reactions to it, however, differ with the forces concerned. Of the three United Nations armies considered in this book, the Americans, I believe, are more prone to act on unchecked rumors than are their British or Chinese allies. This, undoubtedly, is partially the result of war inexperience. American propensity for exaggeration, however, often leads to highly colored reports. Of the many exaggerated stories I have heard in seven years of war, none can surpass those told by American pilots and

infantrymen. The Chinese, like the Americans in that they are fond of self-dramatization and exaggeration, also have the added fault that they try to flatter superiors with pleasant information. This vicious habit, however, is limited in its effect by the natural cynicism of the Chinese and by their long exposure to war. It is the British with their capacity for understatement who are more to be believed either on or off the battlefield than either of their two allies. If I had to risk my life on the basis of information supplied by either of these three armies, I most certainly should prefer to do so on information supplied by British officers.

In this book you will find quite a bit about the wrong information that rises like a pestilential mist from the battlefield. In the chapter on the Battle of the Yellow River, you will see how false reports can affect the course of a battle and, by their very falseness, become a truth. In all this book there remains a lot of falsehood, because, even where I later learned that information we obtained in battle was untrue, I have not changed it in the writing. At the time, it was the information we acted on, and though it may have been objectively false, it was then subjectively true, and hence by derivation it became for us an objective truth.

To that other aspect of falsehood in war—the kind that drops like a mask over the true face of events after an engagement or a campaign is finished—I was introduced seven years ago when I tried to report my first battle. Caught by accident between the Chinese and Japanese lines around the Marco Polo Bridge, ten miles from Peiping, I was so intimate with the flux and flow of combat that in seven following years I have never since been so close to an engagement. I thought I knew what happened, but I was wrong. My fellow correspondents, behind the walls of Peiping, knew far better than I what had taken place. Nor in details were they lacking. Naked Chinese students (why naked, only American newspaper editors would understand), they reported, had, during the height of the engagement, charged the Marco Polo Bridge and stormed the Japanese lines. That this was not true had little or no effect on the legend of the fight that was born that day.

In these words the reader may detect a note of bitterness, but then I was not bitter, only bewildered. Fortunately for my education, I came to learn—and I was thankful for the knowledge—that foreign correspondents and American and British military observers, far from the scenes of action, always had a clearer picture of a battle

than I, at the scene of action, could ever dream of having. I also learned that, as a general rule, everyone in war is more inclined to believe the bad than the good. Thus, if a general were defeated, it was because he had been corrupted by Japanese gold. My rear-line informants, so they said and believed, had "inside" sources of information, and how—how, indeed—could they be wrong? Well, strange to say, I found out that they were always wrong. And thus I came to learn about the myth of war.

Ever since then, through many years and on many battlefields, for me, at least, it has always been the same: there can, because of the nature of the subject, be no exact historical truth about a battle. I arrived at this conclusion, by many tortuous steps, without the aid of books or without any advice. It was only some time later, in the guerrilla areas of China, when by candlelight I avidly read Tolstoy's *War and Peace* for the first time that I realized I had made no new discovery.

"In every description of a battle," says Tolstoy, "there is a necessary lie, resulting from the need of describing in a few words the actions of thousands of men spread over several miles and subject to most violent moral excitement under the influence of fear, shame and death. . . . Make a round of the troops immediately after a battle, or even next day or the day after, before the reports have been drawn up, and ask any of the soldiers and senior and junior officers how the affair went: you will be told what all these men experienced and saw, and you will form a majestic, complex, infinitely varied, depressing and indistinct impression; and from no one—least of all from the commander in chief—will you learn what the whole affair was like. Two or three days later the reports begin to be handed in. Talkers begin to narrate how things happened which they did not see; finally, a general report is drawn up and on this report the general opinion of the army is formed. Everyone is glad to exchange his own doubts and questionings for this deceptive but clear and always flattering presentation. Question a month or two later a man who was in the battle, and you will no longer feel in his account the raw, vital material that was there before, but he will answer according to the reports."

I could not then but be impressed by the insight of these words, and I cannot now, several years later, after seeing war in Burma, Africa, Sicily and Italy, but be struck once anew by their fidelity to the actual way in which battlefield legends are born.

You would think now that the world has been at war for several years that almost everyone would recognize the justice of these observations. Yet not only does the civilian population, far from the scene of action, have little idea of the nature of a battle, but the army officer, even in the lowest combat units, is often bewitched by the official legend to such an extent that he cannot help but parrot it and believe it is so.

It is the fashion nowadays to ridicule Tolstoy for his overemphasizing this point in his battle narratives. It is said that the effect of rumors and both the conscious and unconscious manufacture of wrong reports were the result of a semifeudal agrarian civilization, with its poor communications and its army relationships based more on personal than on military considerations. Had I seen war only in China, I could not argue this point. But having seen it waged by the American Army, efficient war-child of a capitalist civilization, I cannot but conclude that falsehood is an end product of war itself.

I remember an experience I had trying to piece together the battle of the Sicily beachhead. The American First Division had been driven back by a German counterattack to within 800 yards of the sea so that for a time it seemed as if the fate of the whole invasion hung in the balance. Held together by Major-General Terry Allen, but operating often as isolated regiments, the division stood firm and at last drove the Germans back and secured the beachhead. Although I was present at this battle, there were many parts of it that I did not see. In trying to put it together, I went to the head of the division G-2, an exceptionally intelligent lieutenant-colonel. Instead of telling me his version of the story, he handed me the bare telephone conversations and orders of the day on which the engagement took place. "This is the only thing that contains any truth in it," he said. "We are making out a report now, but it is already so different from what happened that in a few days it will be an unrecognizable legend."

That colonel was a rare and honest officer. Brigadier-General Theodore Roosevelt, assistant commander of the same division, was another of the same caliber. I think this was partially because Roosevelt had a wider education than most American officers, and because, unlike most officers of his rank, he was continually in the forefront of action and so could see the discrepancy between the official report and the actual event.

But men like these are rare. Contrast them with those official observers from the various war-time capitals of the world who, making

a flying inspection trip to some army headquarters, drink copious draughts of the official legend and go away drunk on the brew of their own imagined knowledge. Hearing these men pontificate on the badness of such and such an infantry division and the goodness of such and such an artillery outfit or hearing them tell the tale of this good commander and that bad general, one cannot but be moved by feelings of contempt and pity.

I say this to show the inevitability of falsehood within official army reports and unofficial army legends, and thus to show how difficult it is to write truthfully about military events without a different approach from that of a pure military reporter.

Several years ago I was wont to beat my young brains out seeking to find the truth in all the falsehood of war. I tried, in my naïveté, to trace every event back along the trail of its unfolding to its pure and truthful source. I used to run from one general to another trying to wrest a straight tale from a mass of contradictions. As all such searches must, mine, too, ended in failure. The kind of truth I was looking for just did not exist.

There is, and I am only just finding it out, only one solution for this dilemma. That is to write about events not like a reporter or a historian but as an artist. Unfortunately, because of my present shortcomings as a writer, I am not yet able to put this conception into execution. Still, I believe that one can only portray the higher truth of the battlefield, or any complex event, for that matter, by bringing the power of imagination to bear on facts. "The historian has to deal with the results of an event, the artist with the fact of the event," says Tolstoy, and there is a world of difference between their two approaches. Therefore, I think it is only fair to warn the reader of my method.

It may seem immodest for an author to carry on at such length about his own writing, but if certain sections of this book serve no other purpose than to enable the reader to recognize falsehood in war, then they will have performed a useful function.

2

If I were asked to state what quality is almost always present on the battlefield and distinguishes a battle most sharply from any other sphere of human activity, I think I should call that quality uncertainty. This characteristic of combat is given much attention by

Clausewitz, and it is instinct in every battle description Tolstoy ever wrote. It is what Foch meant when he said: "The governing condition of War is the Unknown"; and it is aptly and poetically summed up in the oft-quoted phrase "the fog of war."

This uncertainty is the mother of falsehood in war, and it arises partially from the fact that the majority of the soldiers have only a rough familiarity with the locale where the battle is fought, partially from the inexact knowledge of your own troops. But most of all it springs from the fact that no one knows, or ever can know, anything certain about the enemy. As the British general, Bruce Scott, in the battle of the Burma oil fields said, "you can only grasp at the shape of the antagonist before you, and then when you think you've solved the mystery of his personality, he vanishes into thin air like a jinni."

What makes this so terrible for the soldier is that unless he gets some idea of the enemy, his strength and whereabouts, he may be killed off at any moment. Picture yourself holding a slender, futile rifle, moving in the dead of night across broken unfamiliar ground, where everything assumes a strange, supernatural aspect, moving toward a hidden and concealed enemy, who may at any moment mow you down with a sudden burst of machine-gun fire; or put yourself between the high, hard walls of a Higgins boat, and hurtle blindly toward a shore which you have never seen before, knowing in all the turbulent mystery of the night only one certain thing—that an armed and vicious foe is waiting on the other end of the water to kill you; imagine this thing to yourself and when you've done it, know how uncertainty can tear like a beak at the soldier's heart. Or imagine that you are a commander; just imagine for one moment that you are Chinese General Kwei Yung-ching of this book, thrown into the middle of the battle of the Yellow River. Put yourself in his headquarters, surround yourself with the enemy, throw your last reserve into battle, then sit there—amid the harrowing sight of suffering and danger—and listen to the rumors and the insane reports; give sympathy to the protagonists of every kind of scheme and plan who are bargaining for your ear; wonder with a sense of detached dread whether the enemy is bringing up more reserves; and then, in the twilight of know-nothing that embraces you, know this—that you have to come to a decision—and tell yourself you must now—that you have to! Know that the worried officers and men around you demand it; and then, stretched on the rack of doubt, see, too, before you act, the result of your decision if it's

wrong—the broken, shattered army, the disgrace, the shame and the defeat. Feel your emotions overwhelming your intellectual conviction and know that your tact and judgment no longer have the power to penetrate through the clouds of uncertainty, or to pick out of all the contradictory welter of alternatives the proper course; and even while your soul draws back from action, crying: “I cannot do it!” then come to a decision.

It is too hard. You cannot imagine this uncertainty if you have never been there. It is everywhere, and its effects are felt even before a battle. Uncertainty exists in the line of march through an unfamiliar country, on the water before an invasion actually begins, and it exists subjectively in the minds of the men who never know what they are going to meet. But when once met, it is no better. For the uncertainty, instead of melting away in the action, only expands and multiplies a hundredfold. Every action on your part now only produces a counteraction on the enemy's part, and the thousands of interlocking actions throw up millions of little frictions, accidents and chances, from which there emanates an all-embracing fog of uncertainty which none but the coolest minds can penetrate with any hope of achieving the truth.

The effect on the human system of this kind of never knowing what is happening can hardly be imagined by one who has never experienced it. Uncertainty is a corrosion that eats away the armor of the soul. Most normal men, in no matter what branch of life, long for security. On the battlefield, there is none, either physical or emotional. A general, if he does not live in a world of physical insecurity, lives in a world of emotional instability. The effects of uncertainty on him are multiplied many times by worry over his responsibility to the nation and to the men under him.

As a writer perhaps I am inclined to overestimate this aspect of war and combat. Undoubtedly, my own preoccupation with uncertainty arises partially from the way I try to see a battle. Ever since I can remember, I have tried to feel a battle as well as to observe it. One reason why I approach combat in this manner is because you can get a general picture of how a battle was won or lost after the action is over, but it is almost impossible to recapture the feel of a battle except at the moment it is going on. Thus in headquarters I have tried to identify myself with the commanding general and his staff, to subject myself to all the play of prejudice and personality, to become alarmed or overjoyed, when others were alarmed or over-

joyed, at the bad reports and the good ones, to plunge at one moment down into darkest despair and soar at the next into the realms of ecstatic jubilation. In short, I have tried to make of myself a sounding board for every fortune of the battlefield, changing my colors like a chameleon amid the flux and flow of the battle.

To live like this in a perpetual state of emotional unbalance, to allow your feelings to race and gallop where they will and to be perpetually raped by the stroke of every design and mischance, is, of course, the opposite of that intellectual impassivity, that cool and balanced presence of mind, which a good soldier needs to make him proof against the strong and vivid impressions of the battlefield which are always directed at the emotions. But for a writer, who has looked too long and too often on fields of combat, it is the only method to keep alive his flagging interest. At least, it is my only method.

For several years now I have had the feeling that combat is like a drug that at first works violently on the senses, but when taken in repeated doses begins to lose its effects. I remember how, in such a dangerous action as landing in the enemy's rear, described in the seventh chapter of this book, even when we were surrounded and cut off, and men were sobbing and crying on the ground beside me, I could only feel an utter weariness and a lack of interest in the whole senseless proceeding. But I knew that was not the predominant character of the battle, and I had to shake myself and crawl back into the main emotional stream of the men to get the feel of what was going on again. This, I submit, is hard and nerve-wracking. Briefly, when acting as a writer, and not for myself, I have given my heart rule over my head.

I say this is hard. To operate on a shifting ground of uncertainty tears at every fiber in your being. One cannot live long in an earthquake of feeling without losing emotional stability. I say this is so because it has happened to me. And if that has happened to me, who have no responsibility save to myself on the battlefield, how much greater is the strain on a man who is responsible for thousands of lives!

As I believe that the governing condition of war is the unknown, and as I believe uncertainty is the emotional expression of that condition, so do I believe that this factor in combat, and its terrible effects on the human system, are not given their due importance. I think that American soldiers are better trained than any soldiers I

have seen, but in this one respect their training is sadly deficient. The men have been drilled in the use of their arms until they are well-nigh perfect; they have been put through the simulated rigors of war until they are hard and tough enough to stand almost any physical exertion; but no one seems to have taken the proper trouble to introduce them to the uncertainty of war. Undoubtedly, it is difficult to simulate actual battlefield uncertainty, but why is it that new soldiers almost always believe that things will go according to plan? Why is it that no one tells them that no plan that God or man ever fashioned worked out in detail as devised? Men study maps and practice jumping off landing boats; but when the time of action arrives and a Salerno comes along, they peer out of their boats into the uncertain darkness ahead and refuse to jump, or jump ashore and turn around and jump back into another boat, or dig in the sand on the water's edge and have to be exhorted by chaplains to advance into the unknown that lies ahead of them. Uncertainty has smacked them in the face, and they don't know what to do. Or why do they refuse to believe a wounded correspondent and take him and lay him inside the German lines, because the plan decreed that American troops should be where the Germans were and because the plan called for ambulances to come driving down highways? Why had not someone told them that troops are never where they are supposed to be or that ambulances don't drive down highways, as they do in maneuvers, two hours after a landing on a hostile shore has been made? Give me battle-hardened veterans any time, not because they are more courageous, not solely because they are more proficient in the use of their arms, but because they know everything in battle is a lie, and because they know the fact of uncertainty and shift their ground to meet it.

Let no one be mistaken by what I have written above. Uncertainty is no figment of an overwrought writer's emotions. It is the very air in which a battle breathes. It lies coiled at the heart of every combat section in this book. In the retreat from Hsuechow, in the flashing of the artillery at Lanfeng, in the bloody trap at Yennangyaung, at the concrete emplacements of the Mareth Line, in the landing at Sicily, the commando stab at the enemy's rear near Messina, and in the mess at Salerno—in all these battles there sits, like a king on his throne, uncertainty deified: the uncertainty of the enemy's whereabouts, the uncertainty of falsehood, the uncertainty of surprise, the uncertainty of your own troops' actions, the uncertainty of a strange

land, the uncertainty of rescue and the uncertainty of confusion itself. So I say that the unknown is the first-born son of combat and uncertainty is its other self.

3

I have said that no plan is ever carried out in its original form. I think this is principally due to what von Clausewitz calls "friction." Suppose, as was the case at Salerno, troops are ordered to capture a piece of high ground overlooking the beach before daylight. Why is it that this order is not carried out? It is principally because of the innumerable unforeseen and unforeseeable difficulties which accumulate and produce a friction that slows down the whole action. Troops land on the wrong beach, get lost from each other in the dark, run into seven and eight lines of barbed wire, become angry, depressed, doubtful or afraid and inevitably come far short of their mark.

It is all very well for someone far in the rear to criticize troops for not performing some simple act, but what these people don't realize is that "everything is very simple in war, but the simplest thing is difficult." The mere act of moving from one place to another, of finding this unit or that unit, of getting something to eat, of performing all those normal functions which are simple acts of everyday existence in times of peace can in war time be performed only with considerable opposition, delay, annoyance and irritation.

I think uncertainty is the ruling condition of the battlefield, but friction is the quality which is most universal to combat and to war itself. I hate to think of how much more time and energy I have spent in getting to see a battle than in the actual seeing of it: of the misspent hours on stalled railways, of the wrong roads taken, of the futile searches through hills for regiments and battalions; of arguments with censors, with public relations officials, with police; of being arrested not once but several times as a spy; of being blocked, obstructed and endlessly delayed by the countless frictions of war.

Just consider the simple matter of sleeping. I remember a bitter retreat through Shansi province in north China. It was cold; there was snow on the ground, and we had no overcoats. After some hardship we came to a walled town, expecting food, warmth and a welcome. Instead, we found the doors locked against us. It took some time to beat them down and make a fire out of the furniture. And I

was sorry only for the time lost to sleep and not for the damaged property.

Or consider a messenger out of the American army. In the battle of Troina in Sicily, one of the American regiments was running low on ammunition, so, being in an urgent hurry, they sent a messenger to the rear in a jeep. By chance, no ammunition was available for quite a distance, and the messenger ran pretty deep into the rear lines. Tired from twenty-three days of ceaseless battle, he took off his helmet to rest his aching head. An M.P., seeing this violation of General Patton's regulations, stopped the jeep and arrested the messenger. In the meantime, of course, the regiment wondered what had happened to its ammunition.

Some day when you are on a railway in this land, running six hours behind time, unable to get to the dining car and fuming at the difficulties of war-time travel, just pause a minute and cool your wrath by multiplying your difficulties 100,000 times, and you will begin to get an idea of the friction generated by an army in war. And when your son comes home, don't tell him about the vexing circumstances you have had to endure since the war began; for he will find you a little ridiculous. Just so, I, after four years of war in medieval China, used to find American officers and their preoccupation with trivial circumstances slightly ludicrous. What Americans with their air transport, their smooth-rolling vehicles, their modern medical service, their scientific rations, their newspapers, their letters from home, and all the comparative luxuries which a capitalist civilization can supply to its armies in the field, would know about the depressing friction of a poor feudal army world? In China food, shells and even guns have to be carried by human coolies, not just from regiment to battalion units but for hundreds of miles from the rear. What could these Americans know of a gendarmerie, a nest of political spies and a secret service interfering in every action of the army? How they can even understand such a friction as this, no one has yet told me.

You will find numerous instances of friction in this book; yet you will find them not in proportion to their actual quantity in war but more in proportion to their importance. Friction as contrasted with uncertainty plays upon the mind of the soldier all the way from the deepest rear right up onto the field of combat. But once an actual fight begins, though friction still exists everywhere, it loses its emotional importance until the action is over, when it once more comes

to the fore. For a soldier under the stress of action does not have so much leisure to be annoyed as he does at other times.

4

In the mind of the civilian, what distinguishes war from almost any other activity is the danger involved. Yet five-sixths of the army are never in any physical danger at all. Therefore, it seems to me that physical courage exercises almost no influence on the outcome of a war. If we enter the narrower field of combat, physical courage generally exists in such equal quantities on both sides, as not to affect the outcome of a battle much one way or the other.

Clausewitz has said that the first quality of a warrior is courage, but he did not say that it was the most important quality, and he was at some pains to point out other far rarer qualities of the soul that are of use to the man who makes war. For this reason our newspaper accounts of Pilot Joe Smith's feat of shooting down twenty-five Japanese planes or Private Gus Brown's daring in charging a German pillbox often read, to me, like just so much sports reporting. They record events that are ephemeral and of little long-run import.

The novice generally wonders if he will be afraid and whether his courage will be sufficient to overcome his fear. I do not know about other people, but I am afraid, to a greater or lesser degree, in every battle. I cannot exactly say that I have overcome my fear, but rather that my fear has never yet overcome me. Of course, that is only a negative sort of courage, and a most vulgar quality indeed. I cannot recall any moment on the battlefield when I was completely panic-stricken and lost my presence of mind. I have had flashes of sheer terror when I heard and saw a bomb hurtling down toward me, and I had one second of paralyzing fear when I was wounded, but I have never lost the capacity of thinking and coming to a decision. Even when I was wounded, I retained enough presence of mind to try to prevent my unwitting stretcher-bearers from taking me into the German lines; but they, probably, because they had never seen a battle before, thought I was afraid, and would not listen to my advice.

Curiously, new soldiers are generally not afraid as they go into battle. It's that way with anyone meeting danger for the first time. I remember, in the early days of the China War, how Chinese peasants used to gather in the streets and clap their hands like excited

children as Japanese planes roared down upon them. They did not know enough to be afraid. When the first bombing came, being unprepared for it, they were panic-stricken. So it is with new soldiers. Usually, as von Clausewitz points out, before they have learned what danger really is, they form an idea of it which is more attractive than repulsive. "In the intoxication of enthusiasm to fall upon the enemy at the charge, who cares then about bullets and men falling?" Who, indeed, in the imagining of the event, but let the event come true and how different everything is! Then the weird aspect of everything and the uncertainty of every previous known value corrode the novice's heart; and, though he may not give way to panic, he vacillates, delays, finally halts altogether and does nothing until he is spurred forward by his comrades and his commander.

I believe it is the better part of wisdom for a soldier to worry and know a little fear. I remember how tense, excited and frankly somewhat afraid the veteran American First Division was when we headed for the beaches of Sicily. Yet, when those men hit the beaches and went into action, because their fear had given them a good psychological preparation, they acted coolly and obtained their objectives with a minimum of waste emotional effort. How different was the green division which was sent in to assault Salerno! The men were not worried, tense or afraid. In the boats, they pointed to the flash of shells and to the bursting flares, as if they were children seeing Coney Island for the first time. But when they hit the beach, because fear had not given them a proper education, their coolness vanished in a flash. Later, I understand, that division made an enviable record in Italy, but then the men acted like all new soldiers who are not afraid prior to battle.

Of course, anticipatory fear can be overdone. It sometimes results in prebattle neurosis. Perhaps that is why Hemingway says that "learning to suspend your imagination and live completely in the very second of the present minute with no before and no after is the greatest gift a soldier can acquire." This statement, I think, needs to be examined from several angles.

The idea that danger does not exist, until the moment of danger, makes a nice fatalistic charm for the soldier to wear around his neck; yet in a larger philosophic sense it seems, to me, to be false. Pure materialism, it is contrary to common reality and allows little room for the fact that subjective ideas have their influence on objective facts. Fear of the unknown, whether it is justified or not, is a real

fear. Just as a child's fear of ghosts is a real fear, even though the ghosts exist nowhere but in his own mind. I think a man who has come face to face with a machine gun, that is, with something finite and certain, often needs less courage than a commander who, having thrown all his reserves into battle, is afraid the enemy still has more reserves with which to attack him. The one has to wrestle with a definite danger; the other faces only a possible danger. But on whom is the strain greater?

This gift of suspending the imagination, is it such a great gift after all? Is it not a negative gift? Men who have this quality may not spoil anything in war, but will they have any positive motive for action that will take them to any great height?

The American Army today is filled with men of courage, but one must search a much longer time to find men whose courage proceeds, as von Clausewitz says, "from positive motives, such as ambition, patriotism or enthusiasm of any kind." And rarer still, indeed, in the American Army, is that bravery which springs out of the heart of politics. Belief in a political goal can heat a man's courage up to a pitch of battle ardor, and higher still, to long, steadfast resolution. But in our army, today, there is little of this kind of feeling. The American is brave, daring and resourceful, but his courage is mostly that fatalistic kind which he wears like armor. Sometimes, the armor is not enough, and it rusts away, revealing a hollow, broken man inside the soldier's shell.

Many of our army hospital cases are mental cases. Why? There are many reasons. But one is this: our men do not believe they are fighting for anything. Not one in a hundred has any deep-seated political belief. I find it only natural if this affects the soldier's courage.

Psychologically, the lack of a belief in what he is doing expresses itself in the idea of the futility of endeavor. The soldier thinks: "What is the sense of undergoing all this misery? It is accomplishing nothing. I have nothing for which to fight." He would like to get out of the bloody mess, but, because of his training, his social fear and his loathing to let down his comrades, he can't run away. It is an insoluble dilemma: he hates the business, because it's senseless, but still he can't get away. He solves the problem in his subconscious by becoming sick, by developing a battle neurosis. So he develops amnesia, or becomes deaf or dumb or just gets plain battle-wacky, and they send him to the rear where he's safe. No, that

hedonistic living for the moment just won't always work on the battlefield.'

5

You can take your physical courage, but give me resolution, staunchness, firmness every time. It undoubtedly is a hard and difficult thing to climb into a bomber and run down upon the enemy. Yet what does it require? Once you are in the plane, you can't get out again; you have to go on. For a man in such a position, one "outpouring of the forces of the soul" will sometimes suffice to do the job. One run upon the target, one soul-stirring charge and it's all over. One admires the flash and dash of the charge, but is it not a thing that hundreds of thousands of men could do? And what strength of character is required? How many times have we seen bold men in inferior positions lose all their resolution when raised to a higher position! How greatly courageous is the rank and file of the American Army! Yet look in the upper brackets of both the British and the American Armies and see if you do not see men hypnotized by "security" and showing little of that bold resolution that characterized them as younger officers. Yes, courage of the moment is a trifling, vulgar quality, requiring little from intelligence. And, to turn again to von Clausewitz, "men of little intelligence can never be resolute in our sense of the word. In difficult situations they may act without hesitation, but they do so then without reflection, and a man who acts without reflection is not, of course, torn asunder by doubts."

If you want to see the difference between courage and resolution, compare the guts of the men in this book who landed behind the enemy's rear near Messina with the resolution of their commander who held them together as a cohesive force against all their doubts. And then go all the way up the scale to General Li Tsung-jen, who, when his army of 300,000 men was cut off, coolly mapped out a dozen different ways of retreat and then guided his whole army through the Japanese lines to safety. What a world of difference there is between a man who jumps from a landing boat and a resolute general like this! Both are admirable, but one can only boast of negative courage, while the other exhibits staunchness, firmness, coolness, presence of mind, imagination and resoluteness; in short, strength of character.

It is very easy to confuse the courage, daring and boldness of our dashing pilots—the very finest, most generous, carefree men in the world, one must admit—with strength of character. But people who do this forget that strength of character is a compound of intellect and boldness. I will not deny that our daring young men might conceivably be better able to direct the war than some of our vacillating, irresolute generals, but to those who are loudly vocal in this opinion I would introduce the following statement from von Clausewitz:

“Almost all generals whom history presents to us as merely having attained mediocrity, and as wanting in decision when in supreme command, are men who had distinguished themselves in the lower ranks by boldness and resolution.”

A young pilot once he enters actual combat has little time to be torn asunder by doubts. He makes a decision in a split second, whether good or bad, and that is the end of it. But take those young men which the rapid war-time expansion of our army has raised to heights where perhaps their intellect does not qualify them to be. What becomes of all their boldness then? As of old, they see the necessity of coming to a resolution, but now they have time to ponder and worry and see the results of a wrong decision. “Since,” says von Clausewitz, “they are not familiar with the things they are concerned with, their intelligence loses its original force, and they become only the more timid the more they become aware of the danger of irresolution which holds them spellbound, and the more they have formerly been in the habit of acting on the spur of the moment.” Consider these words, and then consider the Allied force which landed at the Anzio beachhead in Italy. One wonders whether the boldness of the commanders, which was so noticeable on other individual secret missions and daring escapades, had not evaporated under the stress of responsibility.

One of the boldest, most single-minded and resolute men I ever saw in war was a commander of the U. S. Army’s Rangers. I have seldom seen a field commander give orders with greater simplicity and clarity, seldom a man who acted with such quick decision. But still I do not know, and I cannot help wondering whether his intellect was equal to his boldness, energy and forcefulness, and therefore it is hard to say whether he would still exhibit the same force of character in a higher position.

Again, one of the most dashing, daring figures I ever saw in war was Colonel Robert Scott, one-time commander of American fighter-

plane forces in China. Hot and angry with the desire for battle, Scott was yet a cool and deadly killer in combat. He had, I think, a nearly ideal fighting temperament. Yet taken alone, this temperament has its limits. Scott has told in his book, *God Is My Co-Pilot*, how he and other airmen planned to kidnap General Stilwell and fly him out of Burma against his will.

I can admire the youthful ardor and daring conception of this exploit, but when considered against the larger background of war, what would have been its result? General Stilwell was commander of all Chinese forces inside Burma. The Chinese nation, after four years of bitter resistance to the Japanese, had been disillusioned by the Allied reverses, at the surrender in Singapore and at the British opposition to the use of Chinese troops within Burma. The Japanese were hurling daily ideological bombs into Chungking, claiming Asia for the Asiatics, and loudly saying the Western Allies were deserting the Chinese. General Stilwell, though he knew that he perhaps could direct the retreat with better efficacy from India, also was aware of this political condition and of its concomitant moral dangers to the army in the field. Therefore he realized—and he was criticized by ill-informed younger American officers for it—that his main job under the circumstances was to stay with his troops in Burma.

At times, I have seen staunch, firm and resolute Chinese commanders, but, among the American and British generals I have seen, only Stilwell impressed me as having that power of intellect and strength of will that raises a man above the rank and file of common officers and gives him the qualities required by a good commander in chief. Undoubtedly, there are others, but I have not seen them.

In the early days of the war, when other generals were loudly wailing for reinforcements, materiel and help, Stilwell was one of the exceptional few who did not cable to Washington his tale of personal woe. And of all the American theatre commanders, none has received less help and none worked under more difficulties. Let some of these other commanders, who think their cup of woe is filled to overflowing, be made responsible not only to the U. S. War Department but to Chinese and British authorities; let them see the moral force of one individual after another die away, until the whole inertia of the scared mass rests its weight on him; let them know that no matter what they do, there are those who will say it was all

wrong—let them be put in this position, I say, and understand what it means to be a resolute commander of iron will.

Old von Clausewitz says: "No general and no army will improve a disgraceful defeat by depicting the danger, the distress and the effort which would immensely enhance the glory of a victory." That is why I think one of the classic statements of this war is that made by General Stilwell when he came out of the jungles of Burma, a defeated commander. "The Japs gave us a hell of a beating," he said. Such a statement springs only from a strong character.

Strength of character, of course, can lead to a degenerate form of it, obstinacy.

Where perseverance ends and obstinacy begins is hard to say. It is very easy, says von Clausewitz, for a hardened commander to fall into the error of proceeding with a plan from a feeling of opposition instead of from conviction or from a higher principle. Such men are for the most part vain and deficient in a higher intelligence. From another viewpoint, we may say they lack the intellectual boldness to alter their plans.

In this book, I think you will find only one example of such a type of boldness. Curiously enough, it is exhibited by a vain man, General Sir Bernard Law Montgomery. You will find the story in the Battle of the Mareth Line. After being repulsed and finally thrown out of the Mareth Line, Montgomery had the imagination, the strength of character and, I think, in this instance, the boldness to abandon his effort there and to throw all his weight around on the left flank. In the midst of a repulse, the ability to come to a speedy decision like this is the mark of a good if not a great commander. Of course, our judgment of the sagacity of the decision rests somewhat on the result, and without considering the forces on either side one might indulge in too lavish praise. Yet Montgomery's quick instinct for situations is a valuable quality for a commander to possess.

For a layman like myself to pass judgment on this or that commander would, even with all available facts, be somewhat presumptuous. But the error of judging a commander on results, without considering the circumstances, is one in which not only the civilian population but the higher army hierarchy is too prone to fall. For example, the feat of conquering Sicily in five weeks may to an outsider appear like a considerable achievement. But when one remem-

bers that the American and British had in the neighborhood of fourteen divisions against the Germans' two, had overwhelming artillery superiority and complete dominance of the air, and that the Germans were in every engagement deserted by their Italian allies, the feat does not look so considerable. It was somewhat difficult for most correspondents to take General Patton very seriously when he called us together after the capture of Palermo at the western end of Sicily and announced that his conquests had been made "at greater speed and against greater opposition than when the Germans overran France in 1940." It was doubly difficult for me to take his statement with the seriousness with which it was given; for I had during the advance toward Palermo been in the vanguard of one of the reconnaissance outfits and had entered the city even ahead of those soldiers, so I knew how really little opposition there had been. General Patton had thrown three divisions against the city, but all they met were scattered and demoralized Italians with about six German guns. In the meantime, of course, the main German force had, with the knowledge of us all, long since withdrawn to the eastern end of the island where they had time to re-form their lines and fight a rear-guard action that delayed us for some time. It is not my intention particularly to criticize General Patton's conduct of the Sicily campaign, but rather to show the error of comparing the handling of the Sicily and Italian campaigns without knowing the order of battle and the general situation.

6

Conditions of uncertainty and danger arouse in the mind of soldier and commander alike powerful emotions of doubt and fear that corrode the very fiber of the soul, but there is another condition of the battlefield which, being almost always present, exercises an influence on the subjective attitude of the commonest soldier toward events. I speak of physical exertion and suffering. After the passage of many years, it is likely that the combat soldier will remember most vividly his moments of highest danger, but now in the midst of war if he were to write a truthful daily letter of his experiences, it would probably be filled mostly with remarks of the strenuous efforts he has to make almost every day of his life.

If in the accounts of our war correspondents from the front there is an emphasis on danger and the soldier's courageous reaction to it,

this is not only a result of censorship, which likes to minimize the harrowing details of front-line life, and of a correspondent's idea of what is important to report in a war, but it is also a result of the fact that one becomes more habituated to physical effort and suffering than one does to uncertainty and danger.

The novice observer, when he arrives at the outskirts of the battlefield, is more impressed with a feeling of sympathy and pity for the suffering and exertion of the soldiers because he can see them, while the danger and uncertainty for the moment leave him unmoved, because in his inexperience he is not yet aware of them. Talk to any new soldier who has undergone long marches but has not seen much combat and you will find his whole conversation rendered somewhat feverish by his exhaustion, centering on his thirst, his hunger, the state of his feet, his need for sleep and on the abysmal ignorance and cruel arrogance of his commander who has put him through such senseless and needless misery. Talk to him later and he will have been somewhat chastened by combat and more inclined to give physical suffering its proper place in the general run of war.

Correspondents in Sicily never failed to notice the difference between the attitudes of veteran British Tommies and green American soldiers who had seen their first fighting. Question a weary British soldier sitting by the side of the road concerning his feelings about conditions, and you would get the answer: "Lot of foot sloggin' but so far this has been a piece of cake." This meant the fighting had been relatively easy. But question an American soldier, and you would get the bitterest denunciation of army life in general and the incompetence of officers in particular that you ever heard. Six months of war have changed the Americans a good deal, I suspect, and they are beginning to look at their discomforts with the bitter eye of humor.

Let no reader be mistaken about what I have said above. My sympathies are entirely with the soldier. I am completely against that type of home-side military commentator, who, on the basis of a flying trip to some headquarters in an overseas war theatre, or, on the strength of a conversation with a staff officer in Washington, has the unadulterated nerve to talk about the "softness" of our soldiers. The only answer to them is that of the man in the lines: "Let the bastards in the rear come out and do it if they think it is so easy."

I remember a conversation I overheard between staff officers of a certain American division in which they were declaiming at great

length about the softness of American soldiers. What irritated these officers was that our troops, after slugging it out with the enemy for several days, moved by hate and all kinds of murderous intent, should, on capturing several prisoners, fraternize with them and offer them cigarettes and food. What these officers, though they were in a division, could not understand was the complete physical and emotional exhaustion of a soldier in a battle. Thus they could not know that our own soldiers could understand that the enemy was undergoing the same kind of suffering. A veteran soldier, at least in the European theatre, knows that when the fight is over, the time for hate has passed. It is just those people who have suffered least, those who are furthest in the rear, who shriek loudest for the enemy's blood. This is not to say a soldier will not become more or less impassive to suffering; he will; he may even become brutalized in the process of war; but, nevertheless, he attains an emotional balance about these things, creating a rude, give-and-take sort of justice of his own.

If I think back upon all the war I have seen and forget for the moment the occasional thrills and excitements, I cannot but realize that by far the greater part of war is just dumb, bestial suffering, weariness and utter and devastating exhaustion. How anyone with a grain of sense can in the face of this, as a writer who came to interview me in the hospital did, talk about the glamor of war or the glamor of the correspondent's profession, I have not the heart to inquire. My eyes for seven years have been filled with the sight of hordes of soldiers, often, as in China, clad in rags and bare of foot, with packs on their backs that would tax the strength of a mule, marching wearily all day long in every kind of weather and on every kind of road, from steep mountain paths to shallow river beds and jungle undergrowths, marching on feet that are lacerated with pus-filled sores, shaking from malaria, their health and life continually in danger, and all this time never once having fully satisfied their hunger or been able to obtain one complete night's sleep.

I cannot find words to describe this weariness of the battlefield. I know that in extreme cases it can cause death. I know that there are hundreds of people who died on the retreat from Burma because, when the rains came and turned the paths into muck, the going became so tough that men, enervated by months of ceaseless resistance, literally and completely were exhausted and lay down on the paths and died. I know, too, that men can become so exhausted in battle

that they can do no more, no matter how much their commanders urge and exhort them. And when this time comes, the wise commander will call off his assaults; for if he doesn't, the men themselves will halt and cry: "Enough!"

I have said that one of the more basic reasons why men develop battle neurosis is because they do not believe they are fighting for anything. But there are other reasons and one of them is exhaustion. It may often be closely allied to the first reason, but in itself it can do the trick. For every man has his breaking point. Do not think, as some of our military commentators, parroting the bromides of someone else, will tell you, that such men are "soft." No, rather realize, with a feeling of awe and admiration, that such a man has undergone every kind of moral and physical drubbing, until his poor mind and body, stretched on the rack of exhaustion, could not undergo any more. And do not believe an officer or commander, even if he be your own son, who says such men are goldbricks or cowards. Tell him, as I say now, he lies.

There is a lot of weariness and some suffering in this book, but I do not think that I have done the subject of physical exertion justice. The actual combat that I have portrayed here was mostly of short duration, and I was more preoccupied with the telling of the battle than with the atmosphere of exhaustion through which it moved. It is only in a connected campaign that the topic of mental and physical enervation could be put in its proper place. And that would in my estimation be a large place indeed.

I think the suffering and the exertion men undergo on the battlefield, along with the life of perpetual violence, danger and uncertainty, do something to their emotional stability and make them long for the kind of life just opposite to that they lead at the moment. The men don't want any more excitement. They want only quiet. In the middle of a battle, you can hear one say: "Gee, I want to look at cows for the rest of my life." Or another will say: "I want to sleep for two weeks." Their dreams are all dreams of escape. I know I have had them, and I, unlike the drafted soldier, have deliberately gone to war. For a while I wanted to do nothing else but see war. That feeling passed. For many years now I have dreamed of a house by a lake in the mountains, dreamed of doing nothing, thinking nothing, just existing.

Because life on the battlefield is harder than any life he has heretofore known, the common soldier carries around in his mind a nos-

talgie dream of his former life. What he creates is a world that never was. He thinks: "If I could only get out of this goddam bloody mess and go home. Just once." Sometimes he does get home. Often the results are far different from what he expected. Often they are shattering and disillusioning; for "you can't go home again." You can't go back to what you were, to what your friends and relatives were or to that never-never world that you have created for yourself out there on the battlefield. I have seen pilots in China, irritated to the point of impotence at the country, at the life they were leading, at the army. "You'll never get me back to this goddam land again," they would say. "If I ever get back to America, I'll never leave it." Some of those pilots did get home. A few came to see me in the hospital. The tale of all was the same. "Jesus! I want to get out of this country. I want to get back with the gang again. Can't you help me get back to China?" They had become divorced from civilian life in America.

7

This divorce of the combat army from the civilian population, of course, is a characteristic of war in any time and in any place. Except in guerrilla fighting where the army and the people are often synonymous, in war time two different modes of existence are created so that the soldier and the civilian no longer seem to be working toward a common goal. What the soldier on leave at home misses more than anything else is the community spirit of the battlefield. He no longer feels that he belongs to some great brotherhood motivated by a common purpose.

Not only at home but in the more immediate rear lines the combat soldier is apt to reflect that the light of human sympathy neither moves through the same medium nor is refracted in the same way as when it is engaged on the battlefield. In the rear lines everywhere are swarms of M.P.'s, secret investigators, officials demanding passes, officers demanding their reward of a salute, generals demanding spick-and-span uniforms; and everyone is suspicious, unfriendly and preoccupied with his own petty interests and inner army politics.

How different is everything at the front! Here no one demands to see your pass, no one scrutinizes your face to see if you have shaved and no one requires of you the flattery of a salute. Here you do not have to swallow the harsh and calculated insults of a mess or a bil-

leting officer in long and weary attempts to obtain a meal or a place to sleep. All you need to do on the front is to drop down beside another soldier, and he will offer you half of his miserable rations and a portion of his blanket for your bed. He has been through it all before, himself, and he is yours down to the last drop of sympathy.

Who in war has not felt and seen what a world of difference there is between the brutal indifference of the army in the rear lines and the brotherhood and sympathy of the soldiers in the combat zone? It is just those men whose lives are most miserable, the very toughest soldiers, those whose job it is to kill, maim and destroy, it is just those men who are most gentle, considerate and moved by feelings of sympathy for others. Perhaps it is because everything in battle—the ground, the weather, the enemy—is so against him that the soldier develops a deep affection for those that are working with and for him in an atmosphere of common danger, exertion, uncertainty and chance. It has ever been the way of men to band together to withstand misfortune and outwit fate, and war binds men more tightly together than almost any other branch of human activity. To share your last crumb of bread with another, to warm your enfeebled body against another's in the bleak and barren mystery of the night, to undergo shame, fear and death with scores of others of your age and mental coloring—who, indeed, would trade these comrades of the battlefield for friends made in time of peace?

If combat creates a brotherhood among men, it also by a sort of dialectic process gives birth to a type of battlefield loneliness that knows no assuaging. It is not the loneliness that a hermit or a wanderer in the desert might feel, but rather that bitter and potent aloneness that one can often know in crowded cities and among multitudes of men. Sometimes the loneliness consists merely in the unfulfilled and unfulfillable desire to be alone. To get away from all the stinking press of bodies, to move apart from the all-too-familiar flesh with its bestial natural functions, just once to be removed from the world of stock jokes, gripes and bitter, humorous, but stale, recriminations—just to be by yourself, to know your own integrity, to possess yourself all alone for once—this, at times, in every soldier belongs to the realm of yearned-for but unobtained desires.

But that is not all by any means. Loneliness is an inevitable fact of human existence. Coiled at the heart of every man and woman, this feeling lies in wait like a snake to poison even our highest joy in the very moment of experiencing it. But if loneliness is instinct to every

person, yet I suspect it is felt with sharper intensity on the battlefield. It is the sense of impending death, the knowledge of the brevity of his days, the huge, all-engulfing burden of suffering, growing always, never lessening, that makes the soldier ever bitter, ever sad and eternally wondering like a child how he ever got into this inescapable predicament.

The soldier knows that defeat is rooted in the very heart of victory, that he may be irrevocably lost at the very moment he reaches out to grab some prize of conquest, that joy in overcoming the enemy and in the triumphant march over the foe's captured bastions is shot through with the painful knowledge of fallen comrades who will never rise to fight again. So from one violent day to another he is taught in the harshest way imaginable that happiness is a bitter, brief, illusory thing, compounded half of sorrow and interwoven everywhere with tragedy.

Under the spell of this realization and amid the hideous sights of his daily life, the soldier will feel that all the joy has gone out of living, that hope has been extinguished forever and nothing but doubt, despair and confusion remains. He knows that time is flowing past and that tomorrow he may die. His loneliness presses round him like a wall, and he cannot escape. He lies on the ground at night, held captive by an unknown fear. He hears the sound of battle and feels that already the best years of his life, all his energy, his very youth, have been poured forth into this world of blood and destruction to no avail, wasted, like so many drops of semen falling to the ground. He feels old, his ardor gone, his power spent, while he lies there a victim of his loneliness.

It may be, of course, that on some starry night the soldier will look upon the hollow vault of the sky and wrest from it a bitter-sweet dream of forgotten years. He may, we say, be able to re-create the days of his youth, and from them compound impending years of happiness. He will—he has to—travel down atavistic paths of longing, searching for the memory-sharpened days of peace. He is sustained and cheered and aided by the very strength of his yearnings, given comfort by a vision and brought joy by the remembrance of long ago. But then the sound of battle impinges on his memories, and he thinks of the morrow, and the day after tomorrow and the day after that, and all seems ruined, lost, and he is filled with impotence, once more stumbling blindly through the eternal desert of his loneliness.

In the frank glare of the day, it is true, the soldier will take a calmer view of things. No longer will he stumble through the dark running after wraiths. Turning sentimental, he will search the scenes of violence all around him for something more tangible—something gentle, tender and inoffensive—to remind him that once there was a way of life other than this. So it is that, after brutally trying to kill his fellow men, he will attach himself to some stray dog, lavishing on a beast all the affection of a lonely and deserted mother. Or he will pick torn and crushed flowers from the middle of a shell hole, decorating his ears, his hair, his bloody, maculate clothing with posies that advertise his loneliness. And final irony—he will with a rude sense of justice adopt the child of a peasant whom he has a few moments before without compunction or pity murdered with a barrage of well-placed artillery shells.

The most tragic substance of a soldier's loneliness is his longing to remain alive or, as sometimes happens, his yearning after death. But the real flesh-and-blood quality of his loneliness lies in his hunger for a woman. You can make all the high-sounding political theories you like about the significance of war, but it is the whole conviction of my war-time experiences that a soldier's hunger for a woman, far from being an urge of little note, is one of the strongest and most inevitable facts of his existence. When you examine the statements, acts, thoughts and letters of hundreds of soldiers, you will find, I think, that they all are suffering from the same thing. In the not-so-buried recesses of their hearts they are longing for some woman.

It cannot be denied that one of the things that most sharply distinguished war-time existence for the individual soldier is the lack of women in his life. It is a curious fact that in fields of endeavor other than war a man may be plunged into an atmosphere of danger, uncertainty, friction and chance, but in almost any activity in which he is engaged in time of peace, the individual is not for long without the company of a woman. Such is not the case in war at all.

It has occasionally been my habit in recent months to give tongue to this loneliness, to lay bare before the public a portion of my own hunger for a woman and so to put in print a feeling not peculiar to myself and a few other solitary men but an emotion known to hundreds of thousands of soldiers in every section of the world. The reception of my efforts has been a good, swift kick in the teeth from so-called "liberal" quarters, who bewail my fall from the heights of political criticism, followed by a good, loud razz-berry from my fel-

low foreign correspondents, who cry "Fake!" and "Romantic rot!" The reason why the liberals become so exercised about the sudden appearance of a woman and her sex in an article on war, I suspect, arises from the fact that they have never felt or seen a war, and so they carry around an image that disagrees with the one which I in my innocent frankness dare to tell. The reason why the correspondents holler so, I can only guess, is because the legend of the profession demands that one must be objective in all things. These critics don't mind sex in fiction, but to bring it into real life—to lay bare your own feelings about a real woman—ah! that's quite another thing and isn't done.

What they don't realize or take into consideration is that war alters the outward relations between men and women, just as surely as it alters economic and political facts.

Of course, while they are saying sex is unimportant and what I write is "romantic rot"—while they are enjoying the civilized privilege of lying between the thighs of their mistresses or their lawfully wedded wives—some poor, half-frozen bastard of a soldier may be eating out his heart on a hill in Italy, pounding his hands into the earth, wondering where, when and how, before he dies, he can ever feel again the sweet excitement of a woman's flesh against his own.

Perhaps the reader may detect in these lines a note of bitterness. Perhaps he may be shocked to realize that perpetual uncertainty and danger lay open a combat soldier's emotions so that in certain situations he is as defenseless as a woman who has been aroused by caresses. It is conceivable that the reader may not understand that the soldier, in the few brief days or months before the fluttering candle of his life is snuffed out, learns to get down to the fundamentals of existence, that in yearning for a woman he yearns for those things that make her a woman—the long softness of her hair, the round mound of her breasts. There are those who will say this is sentimental rot, but it is the published conviction of the writer that hunger for a woman lies close to the heart and core of a soldier's loneliness. And, personally, I know of no sadder commentary on the years of youth, tragically misspent in war, than to say: "He was without a woman."

So far, I have written primarily of the atmosphere and nature of the battlefield; for that is what this book is mostly about. Six of these

chapters are concerned solely with campaigns, battles or engagements. The other two—on the siege of Malta and the downfall of the city of Hsueh in China—are concerned more with those blind, natural impulses which in war belong to the province of the people. The one on Malta is written more or less in the usual style of war correspondence, and I think the reader will find events enough in his ken to get a proper picture of them. However, most of the account is second-hand material, gleaned by me from participants in the siege shortly after it was lifted. Therefore, I think the reader should understand that there is undoubtedly, as there needs must be in any straight reporting account, a good deal of falsehood in this story, and probably the siege of Malta was in many respects different from what I have depicted.

In the very first chapter of this book—The Death of a City—perhaps the reader will meet experiences which he cannot first assimilate with any understanding. This story attempts to deal with the progressive destruction of a city to its final downfall, and to tell through my own experiences the passions aroused in various people by the battle which raged for many months not far from the city and also of the passions aroused by the whole war in China. It is these passions, in this story, seemingly coming out of nowhere, that the American reader, whose emotions have barely been scratched by war, may not fully appreciate.

In this section of the book the reader may notice a certain emotional unrestraint in the writing. It is that way deliberately; for that is the mood of the events I have tried to depict. I do not apologize for any emotion in my writing, since I think the worst thing that can be said about war writing is to call it "dispassionate." War, especially a national war, and particularly in its early stages, arouses very elemental passions. Not to write about them or to try and tone down the feelings of certain people might give the writing perspective, but it certainly would render it false in spirit.

You will meet a girl in this chapter who is very excited, very outspoken in her criticisms and passionately aroused about the war. Although she is in herself an individual, she was but one of many, maybe not all so articulate as she, who were riven to their very hearts about the contradictions of the war in China. Americans, I say, do not understand this. To most of them, war is, and has been, just a brutal, bloody, insane business. But in those early days in China, war was a very stirring thing, and it was a not uncommon sight to see generals moved to tears, peasants torn by anger, and to meet on the

roads boys and girls of sixteen and seventeen tramping out of the Japanese-occupied areas to be guerrillas.

War where the blind hatred and enmity of the people becomes a force is to me a thing of passionate and consuming interest. War, such as the British Eighth Army fought in the desert, with no people either as participants or spectators, I must confess, left me pretty cold. I like people who believe they are fighting for something and can become intensely excited about it. That is why, when I came into Burma after Pearl Harbor and entered my first battle area outside of China, the blasé indifference of both the authorities and the people to the war was like cold water not only on my spirits but on those of the Chinese soldiers.

You will notice a long and rather passionate conversation between this girl and myself about war in China. You must not make the mistake of thinking that I am here expressing my views on war or that I still hold some of the views expressed.

Although I can look on this writing now and say it is emotional, I can also say with heartfelt feeling that I wish the Chinese people were still so passionately excited about their war as this girl was then. Unfortunately for them, long years of war, blockade, attrition and inner political suppression have taken much of the angry spirit out of the Chinese people. What remains still burns with the force of a fire, but is no longer the angry, ardent flame of youth.

When I begin thinking, as I am doing now, of all the war I have seen, and I consider the material that is going into this book, I cannot but realize how little of what I really want to see published is here. Had I but time enough, I should throw out much of the material at present in this book and substitute a great many experiences, more vivid, more varied, with more emotional depth and with greater meaning than the ones portrayed here. I should include a tragic retreat through the mountains of Shansi Province in north China when for the first time I tasted bombed horseflesh, smoked opium, learned about executions and murder at first hand and saw the soul of a race bared in retreat and a nation stirred into fomentation by defeat. I should also include the battles of the Chinese and Japanese terror gangs in Shanghai, where fresh and bloody "anti-Japanese heads" were washed in hotel bathtubs and stuck upon poles in the streets, where I learned how war and terror deliberately employ servants, friends and sons to kidnap, torture, betray and assassinate, and where I learned to travel with my eyes turned toward

the front, rear and side and not trust anyone but those with hearts of political steel.

I should write about these things, but, more than anything else, I should not confine myself to write about the spectacle of the battlefield; I should write about war. For, as I have said, battles are merely the flashing, seductive garments that hide the passionate but terrible whore's body of war, and conceal under shot and shell the all-embracing, all-knowing, chameleon soul of war. I should write about theory, about cold, economic facts transmuted into hot politics and distilled as burning passions through lowly and illiterate peasants. I should spin a tale of people rising, of arming guerrilla bands, of Japanese imperialism and Chinese feudalism, of ground-down British colonies, of arrogant and ignorant Americans, of smugglers, spies, traitors, of generals, politicians and patriots, and of cleaving social and class struggles; in short, about war. For these are the things I have known and seen, and not to write about them would be the crassest sort of lazy cowardice.

Lastly, were conditions different, I would not give you this book, which properly speaking is not a book at all, in its present form. This book merely consists of nine chapters concerning nine different experiences in the field of war. They are connected by no narrative thread save the thread of war and perhaps like the spectacle of the battlefield itself seem meaningless. You must not think this is modesty upon the part of the author; for I believe the material gathered here is truer than most of the books now being published on the war. It is only in the light of what I have seen and experienced, and what I have known of those experiences, that I realize the poverty of my own effort and stand ashamed before it.

You may ask why I tell you about what I have not written, instead of getting down to work and writing it. That is easily answered. Seven months ago I was wounded in Italy and am only now just recovering from my wound. I am preparing to return to Europe for the long-expected Second Front. For, after all, it is much more satisfying to experience the downfall of Fascism than to write about it. Not having time to write what and how I should like, I have assembled material that was already partly written. This book is the result.

Again, you may ask, if I have such a poor opinion of this material as it stands, why I publish it in book form. That is a little harder to answer.

I believe it was Hemingway who said that a writer should not

publish during a war. Long before I read Hemingway, I had this same point of view. For several years in China, I was pursued by friends and publishers who wanted me to write a book on the war in China. I always refused because I did not think my writing ability and knowledge were equal to my experiences or to the overwhelming nature of the subject. I figured there was always time to write a book, but there was not always time to see the war in China. So I went everywhere and I looked, but I wrote nothing except dispatches.

Anyone who goes through war for a long time acquires a feeling that he is specially protected by fate. He sees others fall and die, but, because he is not hit himself, he thinks that his life is charmed. I guess I used to feel that way. Now that I have been wounded, I know that my invulnerability is an illusion. The next time I go out, I feel that I may not come back. So quite understandably I think it is natural for me to want to publish a few battle experiences, no matter how crude the form of writing seems to me.

Lastly, there is another reason for wishing to publish this material, and it is a more important reason with me than all the others. When I was in my twenties and going through my early years of war, I was satisfied to be ripped apart by one vivid, vital experience after another without bothering whether anything would remain after it was all over. Now that I am over thirty, I am finding that these experiences are acting like a drug in my system. I can no longer assimilate or remember them with the old clarity. I think that as people get older, life becomes for them a collection or a perpetuation of memories. The way most people give life to their memories is through the procreation of children. Through them one can see and relive one's own youth. Having at the present writing neither wife nor children, the only way for me to preserve my memories is through a book. To the reader this may not appear a sufficient motive for writing a book, but for me, at this time and under these circumstances, it is, and that is why I am publishing this book. For though I feel there may always be "still time to die," I no longer feel that there is always still time to write.

I should like to express long overdue thanks to Brigadier-General Frank Dorn for his encouraging me to write my first book.

CHINESE BATTLEFIELDS

Chapter I

The Death of a City

"However decisive the defeat experienced by a state may be, still the retreat by the army into the interior, its fortresses and its national levies must be brought into operation."

—VON CLAUSEWITZ

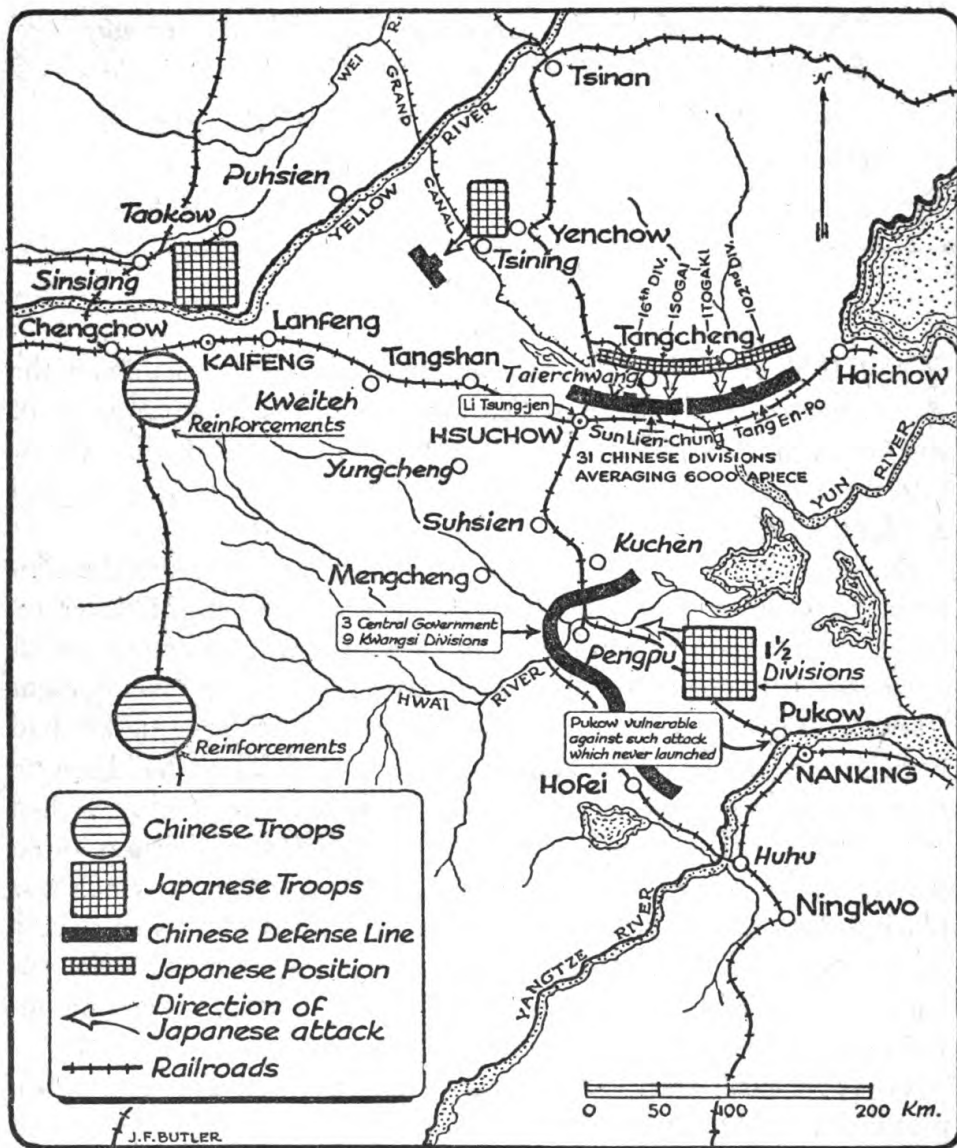
I

IN JULY, 1937, the Japanese concentrated their troops about the crenelated battlements of Peiping and invaded China south of the Great Wall. Quickly they overran most of north China, thrust into the Yangtze Valley and captured and raped the Chinese capital at Nanking.

During this process the invaders dealt out body blows to the Chinese Army from which, at the time, it seemed it might never recover. At Shanghai, during three months of heroic and costly resistance under the guns of the Japanese Navy, no less than seventy-eight Chinese divisions, unprotected by planes and without tanks, had been chewed up piecemeal and nearly decimated. There had been no time adequately to rebuild this destroyed force. The country lacked trained reserves, and replacements in the depleted divisions often did not know how to fire rifles. As a consequence, China, which was placing its faith in ultimate victory on a long war, was in a very dangerous position. The problem in its simplest terms was how to gain time to build up a new army and to arouse a traditionally non-militaristic, nonnationalistic race to resist.

To accomplish this, Generals Li Tsung-jen and Pai Chung-hsi, provincial militarists from the southern Province of Kwangsi, who had in the past often opposed Chiang Kai-shek in civil war, were ordered to hold the city of Hsuechow at the junction of the north-south Tientsin-Nanking and east-west Lunghai Railways. For four months throughout the winter and spring of 1938, Generals Li and

Pai held off the Japanese attacking the city from both the north and the south. Behind the screen of their resistance, Chinese troops were redispersed, levies were summoned from the far-off provinces, new



THE CAPTURE OF HSUCHOW

cadres were trained, a plan for a long war was laid down and the long-sleeping people of China were further awakened.

When China saw Generals Li Tsung-jen and Pai Chung-hsi desperately holding their positions against all Japanese assaults, you

might imagine that everyone, from the highest official to the lowest coolie, either determined to sacrifice himself to save the country or fell into despair and abandoned hope. But, strange to say, the people reacted in neither of these two ways. And the reason was not to be found in any deep psychological consideration but simply in the fact that the majority of the people were ignorant of the true state of affairs in Hsuehchow.

In contrast to Li's terrifying intelligence that the city was on the brink of doom, the check given to the Japanese before Hsuehchow led many into the fatal error of doing nothing and everyone else into contemplating the most happy but improbable possibilities. The loud officials, the lazy literati and the students were all living in a hopeful dream world that sucked up nourishment from the blazing sun of Hsuehchow; but unknown to them the sun had dried up at its source, and it was only the sun's light still moving through space that warmed their world with life.

Yet, because a constellation blazes fiercely in the sky and then disappears from the heavens, one cannot afterwards deduce that a sun, planet or star never existed; for not only does the memory of its existence persist, but the effect of its presence is felt long after it has disappeared. Thus the light that shot up at Hsuehchow was refracted and reflected over the so-called "Republic of China"; and though the original fulguration in spreading out of Hsuehchow over the limitless spaces of Cathay may have lost its pristine brilliance, nevertheless, a mote of the sun here and there fell where the sun had never reached before, dark recesses were set aglimmer, long unused mechanisms cogwheeled into motion and potential energy was transformed to kinetic life.

One might suppose that when the Japanese attacked the Kuomintang¹ in its stronghold of power and pelf and when the landlords, collecting their rentals far ahead, fled from the battleground of the cities to the safety of the country, abandoning the Hsuehchow field to the Kuomintang armies and students, to the poor shopkeepers, peasants and refugees—one might suppose that under these conditions Hsuehchow would lay down her arms and die. Yet in this seemingly unfertile ground, where were buried the warriors of twenty-five centuries, a seed of resistance was planted, somehow broke into life and spread its roots over the whole of China.

¹ The revolutionary and nationalist party in the Chinese Republic chiefly organized by Sun Yat-sen.

The legend of Hsuehchow arming, the tale of Taierchwang² victorious, the names of Li Tsung-jen, Pai Chung-hsi, Sun Lien-chung, Tang En-po and a dozen others marched like good deeds across the continent, arousing, wherever they went, joyful, even if passive, enthusiasm among the literate populace. The hot flame of real or imaginary martial courage that shot out of Hsuehchow singed the country; the fire to a greater or lesser degree swept through many sections of society. As soon as they felt the flame licking along their spines, the yellow politicians, romantic students and sturdy peasants alike, left with no alternative, were galvanized into life. The soldiers dying on the battlefields of Hsuehchow with their hot breath fanned into being the long-dormant spirit of national consciousness, and the fame of Hsuehchow flew across the country.

These phenomena of a partially aroused China and a resistant Hsuehchow were attributed by many people to different causes. Thus we find the political workers ascribing the resistance at Hsuehchow to their propaganda efforts in the rear, while the Communists and a host of others set it down to the adoption by the Kuomintang of the Reds' very own tactics. The students found it in the patriotic songs which they sang in the streets; the Y.M.C.A. workers and the various societies, in the letters they were supposed to have written to the soldiers, in the comfort stations they were supposed to have established for the convalescents; the Kuomintang politicians, in the execution of Han Fu-chu. The Kwangsi clique, not mentioning later, of course, that it was Kwangsi soldiers who had given way on the Hwai³ River, found the cause in their own special Kwangsi brand of organized patriotism; the janissaries around Madame Chiang Kai-shek, in the New Life movement; and so on. All these reasons suggested by every variety of personal prejudice may have satisfied their advocates, but they would not have satisfied the soldiers who are now dead or the officers who lived through those stirring times, and they do not satisfy me.

To take only one example—the New Life movement—if we are to believe the pratings of the eunuchs surrounding the wife of China's leader, a stern order from Madame to the officers of the Chinese Army—"I command you to cease your drinking, to stop all

² The first Chinese victory of the war at the town of Taierchwang about twenty miles from Hsuehchow.

³ The Hwai River south of Hsuehchow in Anhui Province.

gambling and not to sleep with prostitutes or singsong girls," etc.—would have been enough to mold the army into a Christian and certainly victorious force.

But alas for the Sunday-school teachers sitting in their dugouts in the rear, such realists as the staff officers of Kuan Ling-chen, with their silly affectionate names—Doctor Yao, Little Cat, Big Cat and Tiger Ling—visited village playhouses, consorted with actresses and carried on affairs with singsong girls, while Lieutenant-General Fan Sung-fu drank a cup of wine between every sentence he spoke.

That the "immoral" staff of Kuan Ling-chen was largely instrumental in gaining the victory of Taierchwang and that the hard-drinking picaroon Fan Sung-fu at one time saved the flank of the Hsueh line and at another time, when abandoned by everyone else and alone in enemy territory, led his troops back through four provinces for the defense of the Kuomintang officials—that at Hankow these things were true no doubt gave the officials much pain as it gave them the lie direct. But because their jobs depended on Madame's published conviction that demagogic Puritanism would save the country, the palace drones were quite concerned to create the Kuomintang officers in their own image and make them something which we thank heaven they were not. Thus, when a reporter like myself could wire my news agency that Fan Sung-fu in his army headquarters a mile from the front drank wine while he directed operations, when I could feel the simple loyalty, devotion and bravery of this man stuck out on a defenseless wing by himself and when I could feel the poetic anguish of the whole country tearing through this man, all the pseudo-colonels and -generals and professional propagandists at Hankow could think of doing—in fact, all they must do to save their own puny souls and excuse the reason of their very existence in the Chinese body politic—was to censor my message and exclaim that Madame and her New Life movement had decreed that none of the Chinese officers indulged in wine-bibbing. That it was so made no difference. These parasites wanted a share in the glory, and they did not shrink from attempting to dim the glory of the men who were defending them. Such actions could only spring from minds concerned with unessentials and souls diseased with feelings of inferiority and jealousy.

The confusion that existed in the minds of literate Chinese about the events that were transpiring at Hsueh springs from only one thing, ignorance. The ideal Hsueh as it took various shapes and

forms in the minds of different people was quite different from the actual Hsuehchow.

For one thing, Hsuehchow, as cities often do, was undergoing a subtle change, and while the character of China was being slowly transmuted by the catalytic agent of the Hsuehchow battle, at the same time Hsuehchow itself was being no less metamorphosed in a spiritual and chemical bath. But here the process though often indiscernible was quicker and more violent. There was a time lag between the change effected in Hsuehchow and the change effected in the rest of the country. And an action at Hsuehchow did not always immediately have a complementary reaction elsewhere. This is the reason why, at the end of the Hsuehchow battle, the cheers of an exultant demi-nation (China) did not flow and could not have flowed naturally from the situation in the city.

2

In the heart of the city, the streets were still quite full, but they were full of a different kind of people. Everyone was in uniform—peasant soldiers, girl actresses, boy propagandists, gentry officers, Kuomintang officials.

In the houses and the temples of the rich, the wealthy no longer grew fat with eating and idling, for their places had been usurped by officers pouring over maps, signing orders and compiling documents; on the streets the shops were half boarded up, always ready for an air raid. On the cobbles of Tatung Street the merchants were selling only those things of use to the army—straw sandals for the guerrillas, sneakers for the students. On the mud sidewalks the ancient Singer sewing machines were pedaling night and day making uniforms for the army, caps for the army, khaki leggings, khaki shorts, khaki shirts for the army. In the windows of the leather shops hung map cases, brief cases, pistol holsters, shoulder straps—all put there to catch the eye of an officer with pocket money. Near the school buildings and in the meeting halls in the former Buddhist temples there was the sound of play-acting and patriotic singing; outside, the streets echoed with the rumble of army trucks and the challenge of the sentries at night; but nowhere did the normal hum of business and life make itself heard. Hsuehchow, living on the brink of destruction for so long, had become an army town.

The ricksha pullers were agreeing to charge only five cents to

pull a wounded "brother" from the hospital to the station; the beggars were changing their appeals from the open sycophancy of "great and reverend master, pity me" to the subtle flattery of "officer, high-ranking officer, spare a few coppers to keep the people alive." To the beggars everyone became an officer. The privates, the secretary, the foreign newspaperman—all these overnight became officers.

Everything in Hsueh in motion. The young adjutants coming back from the front to buy a few luxuries for their officers. The young adjutants with their testicles full of semen and with only three hours to rid themselves of their load, pawning their belts in the leather shops and taking their handful of money to Beautiful Beautiful, to Little Sister, to Red Fragrance, to Little Cat. And the young adjutants, after wrestling on the dirty beds of Hsueh, going back to the front, minus their belts and minus their semen, with only bitter and passive resignation in their souls.

Forward motion. Backward motion. Trucks carrying supplies to the front. Rice and more rice. Shells but not enough shells. Telephones but not enough telephones. Wine but not enough wine. A bottle of wine for a hundred officers. Wine for the officers, rice for the soldiers. Trucks carrying rice forward, but trucks carrying nothing back, coming back empty, coming back without wounded. Empty trucks rumbling noisily along the cobblestones, drowning out the click of the mahjong cubes in a private room of the military hospital where members of Li Tsung-jen's staff gambled away their bruised souls.

Everything in motion. Forward and backward. Front and rear. The new, raw soldiers from Canton, from Hunan, from Yunnan, going to the front. Tired before they get to the front. Tired, but young, with open faces, singing, shouting. Or isn't it the peasant soldiers singing? Is it just the student political corps singing—but not fighting? Motion forward, singing; but motion backward, not singing. Soldiers coming back from the front, unsinging. Tired, silent, jumpy, nervous, old, with faces lined, mouths open, lips scabby and drooping, hands black, eyes dull and staring. Out of step, sloppy, indifferent, careless, hating the people, hating the officials, hating themselves, going no place but back. One foot ahead of the other—back. Beaten? No! Decimated. Thirty-first Division—one thousand left alive; Eighty-ninth Division—four-fifths wiped out; Thirty-ninth Division—"sacrifices great; we'll fill up again in Honan."

People moving. Refugees streaming in from the north, mingling on the streets with the soldiers, buying nothing, seeing nothing, saying nothing, just moving. People moving. At first, in thin trickles, with beds, mattresses, toilet pots. Overloaded. The rich long gone with their fine stuffs on the railway, on carts, on trucks. The little *bourgeoisie* going now, bit by bit. The poor remain; not to be driven out; too frightened to move; frightened of uncertainty, of nights spent in the fields, of hunger on the road.

And the homeless hungry people flowed into Hsuechow from the fertile alluvial plains of the Hwai River Valley on the south and from the green banks of the Grand Canal built by Ghenghis Khan on the north. Behind them Japanese cannon spewed up shells on the land and Japanese tanks ploughed up the fields and the people fled. And the peasants, moving north and south with their chickens, pigs and children, could look at the May grain ripening in the fields and they could know that in a month, in two months, they would be dead—starved; for their food, their only money, lay ripening in the May sun with no one to gather it in at harvest time. They could know this and flee, for though they were afraid of starving, they were more afraid of what was behind them.

And these people, fleeing from their homes and their grain, poured into the lanes of the great city of Hsuechow as criminals once poured into Christian churches seeking sanctuary; yet what they found was not sanctuary but hell.

3

During the early years of the war in China, the Japanese tactics were always the same. Whenever they were about to launch a final and concentrated drive against a city, they unleashed their air force as an advance guard to break down the morale and order of the people and troops in the Chinese rear. Hsuechow was no exception. As the Chinese continued to retire, closely followed by the enemy, Japanese pilots, arrogant in their new Italian planes, rode in on the spring wind and crushed the people in their homes. From the fifth of May on, the attacks were increasingly fierce. Caught beneath the pilots sights, like a bug under a microscope, Hsuechow was pinned to earth and stabbed with a thousand explosive plummets.

The destruction was terrific. Heavy clouds of smoke occasionally veiled the sun; but they soon passed over, and the sun coming out again glared on the bodies of the mangled people and the ruined

homes. Tatung Street, Hsueh's main thoroughfare, was turned into a field of tile; the steel and mortar wall of the Bank of Communications was pierced with a thousand holes; the second supply station was smashed as flat as a big Chinese cake; the *Mobilization Daily News* and the *Hsueh News* buildings were shaken up one day and knocked down the next; the hospital for wounded soldiers, close by the Catholic mission, was shattered by a direct hit; the patients, unable to escape, were hurled from their beds into the grave; the ammunition dump outside the east suburbs was blown out of existence, whisked away into nothingness. The people's homes were burned to ashes, the *hutongs* were filled with rubble and whole streets were turned into cold, damp fields of tile and charcoal. There was no respite save at night, and then only in work; the refreshing balm of sleep was denied the people, for work had to be performed and it could be performed only when the sun had gone down. As soon as the sun came up, the roads were filled with people. They tramped out on the roads seeking the safety of the country, and if the planes came while they were on the road, they moved off into the fields and lay down until the planes passed over. But each day the planes came earlier. Alarms in the early morning sprang into the people's dreams and kicked them awake, and they ran out into the quivering and shrieking streets, hastily pulling on their clothes as they went. Soon they learned to sleep with their clothes on; soon they learned to get up at four o'clock in the morning and escape from the city before the sun came up over the Dragon Cloud Hill east of the town; soon the people fled altogether, salvaging whatever they could from the wreckage of their homes. One night they were thronging the streets with bags of grain on their shoulders and water and tea jugs in their hands; the next day they were gone. Hsueh was being destroyed and there was no way to keep the people quiet; almost everyone fled; almost every family moved to the country, to a friend's place, to any place. Only the very poor and those connected with war work, such as actresses, officials, police, gendarmes, guards, the city garrison and officers, remained to carry on their work at night.

One such organization, for example, was the Women's Mobilization Committee sent from Hankow to do war work among the women of Hsueh and the vicinity. But there wasn't much that could be done, for there weren't many women left in Hsueh. All educated women had long since fled and there remained only a few

daughters and wives of local shopkeepers, some poor people and the refugees from the north who were still continuing to arrive. These women all wore dirty blue or filthy white blouses and gray or blue pantaloons; there was nothing stylish about them. You couldn't find any stylish women in Hsuehchow. This wasn't Shanghai where all Chinese society women had donned uniforms in the safety of the International Settlement and turned cabarets into hospitals and had their pictures taken while doing it; this was Hsuehchow, dangerous and no place for heroics.

Yet in the end, just before the city fell, when there was work for all hands—to persuade the people to leave the city, to take care of the refugees' children, comfort the wounded and do all sorts of jobs which the army certainly had no time to do—there were only a few girls and boys of the war service organizations left in Hsuehchow. Their efforts were bound to be inadequate.

The need for these workers had become acute. Japanese planes turned Hsuehchow into an outhouse and it stank. The houses stank, the streets stank, and the people stank. The houses stank because there were dead in them. The streets stank because they were painted with intestines, flesh and blood. The people stank because they were full of maggots, dirt and pus.

But the people wouldn't move. Down by the East Railway Station they were still there. Dangerous, but they wouldn't go.

Between the railway tracks and the Taierchwang road lay a hut village. And in the celled hives the peoples swarmed like maggots, making a rank stench. Tired, overworked bodies larded with the smell of stale amours, the sound of cotton blues swishing in the green muck of the community laundry pond, the dumpy, ugly, harassed forms that dashed in and out of their hives beneath a caterwauling of steam whistles, engine switchings and trucks rumbling back from the front. Around these board and mud shacks, the buzzing voices of the Japanese airships mounted, in unceasing fury, often from early in the morning till three in the afternoon, in their hateful roar of terror and death. The station a few hundred yards away was torn to tatters, but the village people, secure between the tracks and the road, panted in excited and stupefied satisfaction: they were left alone. Bombs fell everywhere. The people wouldn't move. Everything near by was destroyed. But near by is a long way. Nobody would move.

One day, in the bright glare of an especially hot spring morning,

the air alarm rang when I was on the road. Instead of turning back to the Presbyterian Hospital and the supposed sanctuary of the American flag, I went on to this village, to the small stone overpass that carried the Taierchwang highway across the railway tracks to the huts. I went onto the bridge. The sharp out-of-breath blasts of the urgent alarm went shrieking across the Hsuchow flats with fear pursuing. My ears were alerted to the straining point; I heard a faint drone in the sky but could see nothing. I looked down on the dirt road below, where a few people were hastily running; the sun was hot, the air was clear; it was getting on toward eleven o'clock.

The roaring increased and I knelt down on the bridge.

Suddenly, a high shrill whine rang through the air. Something shrieked by me, followed by a sharp explosive crack that made the bridge tremble. A man and a boy fled from the road towards the bridge. The roaring of the planes began to rack the air on all sides, while the shrieking and shrilling of the falling bombs merged with the clatter of the explosives as they struck the ground.

My legs became rotten with fear and I lay down. The planes came near. I felt their hot breath on my body and the smothering flood of their slip streams as they passed beyond. Then I looked up to catch a glimpse of huts, earth and smoke mushrooming into the sky. I was caught in a flood of excitement and all I could do was kneel there on the bridge and gape at the exciting scene.

"Devil!" said a rough voice behind me, "what are you gaping at?"

I turned. There was a soldier sitting with his hands between his legs. I pointed to the huts.

"Fuck 'em!" said the soldier with a sharp upward motion of his head.

I took out my camera preparing to take a picture of the smoking huts.

"Put that machine away," called the voice behind me; "want to get us killed?"

He had hardly spoken when a terrific, an appalling roar sounded so near that it might have been the express train crossing under the bridge; there was a flash on the tracks below, a tremendous explosion and then a dense cloud of smoke. Bits of shrapnel flew up on the bridge and pattered on the ground.

"Your mother!" screamed the soldier, howling with anger at me. "Your mother!"

In a little while the hullabaloo ceased; the planes went away, leav-

ing the stricken huts simmering significantly while portions of the sky were shrouded with a cloud of smoke. The incessant roaring of the planes and the whistling of the bombs was followed by quiet; but in a very few moments shrieks and groans shimmered across the Hsueh flats and beneath them the sinister crackling of fire. The empty streets began to fill up; soldiers came scurrying out of corners; the Buddhist Red Swastika Society tripped up the road with stretchers; the tiny toy fire engines rushed in with bells clanging wildly; and the firemen ran around desperately trying to find a place to attach the hose. Some firemen with black helmets advanced on the smoking houses with pikes and hooks, only to be seized in the clawing hands of the crowd which beseeched them to do something; nobody knew just what and nobody let the firemen do anything at all. I came down from the bridge and walked toward the fire.

"Fuck the Japanese! Fuck the planes!" cried the young soldier at my elbow.

I went down on the roadway. A boy lay on his back in the street; he was still. A man was kneeling beside him; his hands were folded before his chest and he was chanting: "My son! My son!" as if he were reproaching the boy for dying and wished to call him back to life.

Close by the crossroads leading to Taierchwang, the houses and shops were burning fiercely; the flames were eating up the wood with terrifying celerity and driving away the black smoke with their intensity, and heating up the faces of the frightened and often hysterical bystanders. Men and women ran up and down in front of the fire, going fifty yards in one direction and turning around and going fifty yards in another direction; cries and wails and sobs mingled with the crackle of the burning timber; firemen had not yet laid their hose and were beating off the panic-urgent crowd; some of them were going back and forth carrying out bodies, and others were trying to clear the roadway, but the hysterical people got in their way and hindered their work.

I went into the midst of the crowd and joined a group of soldiers who were staring at the fire; one of them clapped his hands as the walls of a house gave way before the licking flames and the roof crashed in, sending a shower of sparks in the air.

Suddenly a voice called.

"Look at the old wife. Look at the old wife."

A woman was caught in a square of fire between three burning houses. One narrow hole of escape was open to her, but she seemed not to see it, for she kept darting at the flames and then drawing back again. Her dark hair hung over her face and she looked like a witch, first running at the flames and then jumping back.

"Went to look for her child," said someone.

"Ai ya, tell her to get out of there."

"Hey, old wife, come out! Come out! You'll be burned to a crisp."

Suddenly, a shower of sparks lit on the young woman's coarse black hair and cascaded down her filthy blue gown. She ran around in a circle once and then like a rabbit darted through the small opening between the houses. The crowd cheered. But as the woman ran out on the road, the cheers turned to expressions of amazement and horror. She was distorted and ugly; her flabby and discolored breasts were flopping out of her gown as she ran and were bouncing up and down; her hair was streaming behind her in the wind; and on the tip of her jacket a little fire was springing up and rapidly bursting into flames as she flew down the road.

"Stop! Stop!" cried the crowd, but the woman rushed on heedlessly.

"Somebody stop her," yelled every voice.

Advice was hurled from all sides.

"Grab her."

"Don't run, old woman, you are on fire."

"You can't run away from the fire, it will eat you up," said a wit.

"Well, sonofabitch," said the soldier. "Such a madwoman. Why doesn't she stop?"

"Shut up," said another soldier. "How would you like to be on fire?"

Two firemen ran after the woman, seized her, threw her on the ground and tore her clothes off. This action terrified her and she turned her head from side to side, looking at the firemen with a pleading and helpless air.

When the woman was rescued and a covering found for her ugly body, the crowd grew quieter. Some of the people stood in little knots, saying nothing and looking into the distance.

A young girl was addressing a group of ten or fifteen men and women that had huddled down in the grass beside the road. She

wore a khaki uniform jacket and long pants. The army belt around her waist was pulled in tightly so that her breasts stood out prominently; her bobbed hair hanging down a little below the rim of her army cap barely covered the upper part of her ears; all in all she had a determined, rough but deeply feminine aspect. I went closer to hear what she was saying.

“... We told you to go, but you stayed. You have lost your homes, but you still have your lives. Do you want to lose your lives too? The Hwai is crossed. The enemy is advancing. He may be here before you know it. Go! Leave at once! Go to the country. Go south. The government will take care of you.”

The girl, raising her arms to emphasize her point, presented a picture for my camera and I was just about to snap her when someone tapped me on the back and addressed me in rough tones.

“You, you foreigner,” he said, “you can’t take pictures. What’s the meaning of this? What are you doing?”

It was a police officer. Behind him was the soldier who had been with me on the bridge.

“That’s right,” said the latter, “that machine almost caused me to die once today.”

I looked at the police officer and said: “Look! Your people are dying; the Japanese have killed them. I shall send these pictures to America. The American people will see that the Japanese are killing the Chinese people.”

“He’s right,” said the soldier. “What’s the matter with you? You policemen are all alike.”

“Well, I have orders,” said the policeman doubtfully.

“Let him take the pictures. Let him take anything he wants. It’s all right. It’s a good meaning. Let him take the picture.”

It was the girl who had cried out over the heads of the people. The policeman walked sheepishly away.

I looked my thanks at the girl and started snapping pictures. Just then there was a crash; houses caved in and the fire gasped as if dying; only smoke whirled up from the debris. The crowd moved away. I went back onto the road.

An official dressed in silk called out to me: “You see they don’t bomb military objectives. It’s only the homes of the people. You see.”

“My son! My son!” chanted the man in the road.

“Fuck ’em!” growled the soldier, following me back to town.

4

Dusk came. The Dragon Cloud Hill was hidden in mist. Small wisps of smoke curled up from the blackened plots of ground. The fire was dead. The children's screams and the women's howls fell to an undertone of groaning. The empty supply trucks clacked noisily across the city, scaring up alarming echoes in the cobbled alleys. Up the street a man emerged from his shop and laboriously took down his shutters. The people, no longer afraid, came out of their homes. Tall guttering candles flickered in the dim recesses of the shops and lanterns swung along the road, picking out ghostly forms of soldiers who emerged into the uninquisitive light to buy sweat rags and dirty pieces of wheat candy. As darkness tenderly folded a cloak about the city, the people breathed more easily, for nothing of the air raid remained save the smell of smoke sighing up out of the wounded buildings and the stench of shit and blood and death which lay like a thick covering on certain sectors in the suburbs.

In the Garden Hotel that same evening the guests returning from their shelters in the country brought back with them once more the absonant sounds of normal hotel life. A cat concert went on in every room and the halls jarred like marrow bones and cleavers. A haridan creaking outside my door suddenly fell quiet. Up the hall the jangling sound of copper coins thrown violently on the floor brought to life a woman's sharp imprecation. Slippers shuffled along the floor and went into the officer's room across the way. A door slammed. An amorous operation, noisy, but unseen, was about to start. Next door the subdued tones of Miss Wang Shao-yu in conversation with the Tass reporter, Komoroski, crept through the walls, and I vaguely wondered if she had yet let down her long hair. Above her soft feminine Peiping accents, which even the Russian words could not conceal, came the angry bellow of an officer. He was telephoning the front.

As I sat propped futilely before my typewriter, mournfully listening to the irritable voice of the officer rising above the cacophonous din, my heart went cold and leaden. I thought of the front that officer was telephoning, of the myriad farms of southern Shantung, the green fields and water of Anhui, the ripe bending of golden grain, the people. . . . But what were the people doing? And I thought of soldiers—of soldiers from Szechuan and those from Kwangsi, and

of the rioting confusion of the front, the blot and blur of battle, and the quiet of camp, with soldiers sitting by their fires roasting rice or sleeping in their bivouacs with the young boys standing guard. Were the soldiers now lying on their backs contemplating the stars and dreaming of home, of some clear brook in Chekiang, or a paddy field in Kiangsu or a cool mountain home in Kwangsi? Or were they fighting in the dark with some unknown enemy, or rushing pell-mell in retreat?

My mind was agitated by curiously vivid and gloomy presentiments. I saw again the air raid in the morning: the shrieks of falling missiles, the loud roars of bombs exploding, the frightened screams of children, the ghastly looks of women, the horrid breasts from which the children fed, the crackling of the all-consuming flames, the oaths on the hot air, and the wild crying—these sights and sounds nursed my despondent spirit. But other shapes and feelings, perfumed with the fragrance of the past, arose from memory: the vital words and deeds of officers and men, of Tang En-po, of Chih Feng-cheng, of Sun Lien-chung, scabrous, lonely on a mountain road around a fire; lost legions of Cathay, wandering, beaten, scattered where even military lords with regiments of trumpets could not call them up again. And where were those untamed scamps of nature? Fan Sung-fu? Drunk or dead? Alone upon an unprotected wing, and Hsuchow preparing for the crash, unable to succor him. Cut off? Or heaven-protected as he so fondly believed? And a station master, gulping wine and playing fingers—"seven bridges," "eight horses," "three dollars"—fighting off his lonely terror, and waiting for the moment when the enemy hove in sight so he could flee. Was this an order to obey or to spurn with more courageous common sense? How should I know?

The grisly events of the China War trooped in weird procession through my brain: multiformed and colored fantasies of human sorrow, shame and "unwilling tears," of victims toppling down in death, of slaves who loathed their state and sought to break their bonds, of chroniclers of daily chauvinism inciting slaves toward their ruin and flattering Power with honeyed words of praise. A young man losing his mother, mutiny on the Tsinpu Railway, the smell of opium in the mountains, the taste of bombed horsemeat, a student pissing in his pants while shells whistled over Tungkuan Pass, peasants executed and traitors enthroned in high places. Delusive im-

ages? Creations of my own excited fancy? Beautiful? Or degrading?

The officer rattled over the telephone. His voice was harsh and cruel. Slippers shuffled up the corridor and the officer's voice droned on.

Suddenly, the strangeness of destiny stabbed me with fear. How came I here reeling with a beaten army across all the land? Where would it end? Officer, whore and reporter. Where would they be next week? Next month? Not in Hsuehchow. Hsuehchow was doomed. As I sat in the dreary hotel room staring at the greasy lamp, I felt in the presence of something irrevocable. Neither traditions dark and old nor fables from an ancient past nor evil priests cracking turtle bones over fires were needed to justify this sensation. It was certain—certain as doom. An evil genius following the army, hovered omnipresent in the atmosphere and by some strange device seemed to make itself doubly felt to me this night.

Did I but appear, the army withdrew. Again it must withdraw. It was decreed, it was so. To deny it, was but to feel it; and to feel it, was to know it, though one might still deny it.

This feeling, I thought, is it cowardice? This thing that wraps around you and draws you unresisting into its embrace—does it entrap the commander and the soldiers, too, in its snare and stifle them with claustrophobia? What I am now feeling—is it born in me or is it but the reflection of the Chinese Army's soul in my own soul? Do fighters who have looked too long and too often upon lost fields of battle, see fate's finger pointing at them like a dagger at the heart? Pile up defeat upon defeat; can an army then conceive of victory? Is my soul—the army's soul—warped and molded in the very image of defeat? When one plays a part too well, one becomes that part. Is China's Army therefore eternally doomed to defeat until the very memory of defeat has been wiped out? I looked at the half-written message on my typewriter: "Japs outflanked Chinese troops moving north. . . ." and suddenly a wave of nausea broke upon the shores of my soul. How I hated the planes, the noise, the sleepless, lonely nights and miserable days; how I had my fill of maps, plans, troop movements, of official bulletins, propaganda and of the whole meaning, existence and philosophy of war! I wanted to laugh and sing and dance and fornicate. I wanted a woman—any woman. Nigger with swivel thighs. Javanese with firm breasts. I hadn't had a woman since Shanghai. Since Taiyuan? Since when? The war.

Free love. What a laugh! Well, by Jesus, this time, tonight, right now. That creaking bitch across the way. Coarse, fat, mercenary. Who cares?

I got up, tore the message out of the typewriter, crumpled it into a ball and went to the door and flung it open.

5

A clenched fist struck me in the face.

"Beg your pardon."

A girl's voice.

Sneakers. Uniformed pants. A leather belt. Women's breasts. Bobbed hair under a cap. The girl of the air raid.

Shyly followed by two younger girls, she came into the room, her face flushed, explaining that she had been about to knock on the door when I flung it open. Still smarting under her blow and thinking about the woman I had been on the verge of inviting into the room, I listened to her deep voice, asked the three of them to sit down and was in the act of pouring tea when another knock sounded on the door.

"You have guests?" asked the elder girl uneasily.

"No. Not waiting for anyone. You stay here."

"Come in!" I went toward the door, but at the same time it sprang open to admit three men.

"What! You!" One of the men strode across the room glaring at the girls. "What are you doing here?"

"What the hell is this?" I thought.

The girls remained seated. The other two men came farther in the room. The first man who had come into the room was dressed in khaki. I peered closer and saw he was a gendarme officer. Thin-faced and secret-looking. Behind him like a faithful dog shuffled a young soldier, sloppily dressed, his uniform collar wilting, his sneaker shoelaces untied and a rifle in his hands. Last of all, there was a smooth-faced young man, in a blue Sun Yat-sen uniform with the collar snapped tightly around his neck so that he looked like a younger brother of Cary Grant playing the part of a preacher. He came forward in front of me. The gendarme officer made a slight motion with his head and the soldier went over in the corner and stood with his rifle in his hands. The girls watched uneasily while

the officer came close before them, made a wide leer at them and then jerked his head toward me.

The smooth-faced young man said in English: "Your passport."

"What you come busting in here like this for? As if you didn't know me. My pass—you've seen a dozen times. And yet you knock me up this time of night with rifles."

The young man looked hurt. He said: "I beg your pardon. It's our duty."

The gendarme officer said in Chinese: "Don't notice him."

The girls looked at the floor saying nothing. I went to a corner to get my passport. I heard the officer speaking to the girls in a low, virulent voice.

"Traitors! What are you doing here? This foreign devil leads you on. You his spies?"

I came back and threw the pass down in front of his face. "There's your pass," I said to the young man. I was still speaking English.

The officer looked up at me hard, evidently trying to fathom whether I had meant anything special by throwing the passport down in front of his nose. Diffidently, he glanced over the passport and then passed it on to young Cary Grant.

"What you doing with these girls?" he said speaking up out of the corner of his mouth at me.

I didn't say anything and Cary Grant, Jr. translated the question in English.

"We're talking."

"He says they're discussing things," translated the young man.

"What are you talking about?"

"Just talking."

This answer angered the officer. He snatched the passport out of Cary's hand and slammed it open on the table in front of the girls and said: "He has no visa. You don't know who he is. What you doing here with him? Who are you?"

The girls were embarrassed and they put down their heads, color mounting in their cheeks. Finally, the elder one rose to her feet. Her eyes were flashing.

"We're three girls. Three young girls. Why are you speaking this way to us? What crime have we done? Why are you calling us names? Who are you? Do you have any right to speak to us like this? Look out we don't report you."

"Report me? Ai!" His voice expressed the utmost skepticism and his face took on a hard repellent expression. Quickly, he turned and glanced at me, but I gave no sign of understanding the conversation. He sneered at the girls. "You! like amahs in a foreign devil's room—report—me!"

A moan broke from one of the younger girls. She began making little cries like a wounded bird. "I shall go."

"And I."

"No, stay!" said the eldest girl.

"What law do we break?" she said, turning to the officer. "Does the law say we cannot talk to foreigners?"

"No."

The girl's eyes glowed angrily. "You're not by chance looking for money?"

The officer leaned forward. "No, I'm not. And the time has not yet come when officers, doing their duty, looking out for spies, must take such talk from sluts like you."

"You wretch! No trouble to insult us, is it?"

"Insult—you? Insolent girl! While China eats bitterness, you idle with this foreign hairy devil. Traitor! You've disgraced the Chinese name!" The officer's voice was hard and steady. Suddenly, with a significant glance at his victims, he added in a louder voice: "I ought to arrest you."

The other two girls were rigid, motionless, quiet. Expression was gone from their faces; their eyes stuck upon the ground, now moved secretly to the hard, narrow face of the officer. The elder girl, rendered speechless for a moment, slowly sat down, then rested her hands on the table and fixed the officer with a glare of burning contempt. This seemed to infuriate the officer and he started talking fast.

"I ought to arrest you. But go! Get out; retire from this room."

The girl brought her two little fists down on the table and a stream of talk spurted out of her mouth.

"You get out, slanderous man! What lies! What jealousies! Ai ya! before this foreigner you drag us so low that we cannot but writhe with shame. What if we, young and strong, China's children, on her battlefields and in her bleeding cities, give our souls in service for the nation? What if we in true love cry with the people's misery? Shall we therefore be accused by you jealous and feudal torturers, you police spies who act as accuser, witness, judge? What means

your morality to us who look beyond your gendarme soul and with true love adore our country?"

Both the other girls had risen and one of them was pulling on the eldest girl's hand, urging her to come away. She wrenched it away so quickly that the girls stumbled over each other and then started sniffing to themselves.

The officer's face was loose with excitement, his lips had grown puffy. He made as if to grab her but he thought better of it and drew his hand back.

"I'm not going to put up with you any longer. If you don't get out of here at once, I'm going to drag you out and take you off for questioning."

The girl looked at him wordlessly. Then, suddenly exploding in anger, she shot the one word "Pig!" out of her mouth and spat in his face. "You miserable sneak!"

The officer drove at her viciously, reaching forward with two hands, but the girl was too quick for him and rose from her chair and got out of reach. They both stood there gazing at each other with deep and deadly antagonism. Then the officer, his face purple with rage, struck out with his feet at the girl's stomach, but she warded off the blow with her hands and ran around behind me and put her two hands on my shoulders. Her touch shot through me like fire. Her heavy breath whispered along my cheek.

"What the hell goes on here?" I shouted to the young man who was standing in the center of the room distraught and foolish as if a shell had just whistled by his nose. The soldier moved out a few feet from his corner and lowered his rifle to a forty-five-degree angle.

"Tell him to get out," I said in a sudden burst of anger.

"Oh, no, gentlemen, these girls must go. You do not understand." The young man was extremely distressed.

"Leave these girls alone," I said, breaking out in Chinese.

The officer's face fell. "You speak Chinese?"

"Yes, I speak Chinese. Now get out of here."

"You telling me how to do my job? You mind your own business."

I said: "If you come in here, that's my business. If you're talking to my guests, that's my business."

"Well, you're not telling me what to do. I told these girls to get out of here."

"And what right have you to say who's coming in and who's going out of my room? I do that."

"I'm the law."

"Well, you got a warrant for these girls' arrest?"

"I got a right to do my duty. You're a foreigner; what right you got to stop me? If you want to sleep with these girls, can do. I'll get them when they come out. No spies going get away from me."

"Spies?" I said.

"Sure," said the officer smiling for the first time. He looked around carefully and then brought his eyes back to rest on me in a confidential manner. "How long you know this girl? Ever see this girl before?"

"Which one?"

He jerked his head at the girl standing in back of me. I felt her hand press into my shoulder.

"What's that got to do with anything?"

"Uh huh, just as I thought. You don't know her. How do you know she isn't a spy? You see?"

The officer was now positively leering. He turned and looked at the little group of people who had crowded closer to him. They were standing up now looking from the girl to him, from him to me. The soldier had edged in closer with his gun. The officer said: "You've been making a lot of pretty talk. Love the country and all that. And yet you're here with this foreigner. You say there's no law against it. But you don't say why you're here. Why'd you come?"

"I came—well, you see—I came because . . ."

"Because I asked you," said I.

"You stay out of this," said the girl, her cheeks swamped with blood. The other girls were pale and tense. "There is no need to lie for me, for any of us. I came, we all came, just to talk to you."

"Ha ha ha ha!" That officer's laugh was savage.

I said: "You get out. You've nothing on her. You've nothing on any of them."

The officer swung around. "Maybe I got something on you. You got no visa on your passport."

I went over to my suitcase and took out the pass of the Military Affairs Commission and flung it in his face. "Now you look at this and get out. And don't try to make any trouble. I heard everything you said about foreigners. I don't like it. I'm going to report you. Tried to kick this girl in the stomach. Tried to hit her. That's not

your duty. I'm going to report you to Li Tsung-jen himself. You take a good look at that pass."

Little currents of anger and embarrassment went speeding up the back of his neck to his face. He swelled up like a balloon. Then, suddenly, the prick of self-consciousness knifed him and he exploded with a bang, collapsing audibly, his vanity whishing out in one gust of air. The soldier drew back into the corner, wiping his nose.

"A thousand apologies. . . ."

"Not to me. Make them to these girls," I said.

"A thousand apologies."

He was all bows and smirks.

"But you know I have strict order, otherwise I should not have ventured—you know I am obedient; I have my duty. Ten thousand apologies."

A loud crash. The officer, backing out of the room, fell over the door lintel, tumbling into the hall. Young Mr. Cary Grant followed stiffly, not looking back, his proud buttocks sternly moving away. And last of all, the soldier, with his rifle held tightly in his two hands, came to the door, turned around, made a deep bow and passed out in dignity after his fleeing master.

6

The girls clapped their hands. Their faces were convulsed with laughter. Slowly, the sound of their merriment died away in little painful gasps. Their faces were sad. There was great embarrassment in them. I felt suddenly the ties that bound me to these girls as if we had come a long distance together. There was a moment of cohesion between us, a moment of union in victory, and then it was gone and there were only three embarrassed girls and a man in an embarrassed silence in a lonely and dimly lit room.

"I'm sorry," said the girl I had seen at the air raid.

"What are you sorry for?" I asked.

She leaned against the wall limply, looking sadly at me.

I went to her, gently touching her arm. "Don't look like that. It's all over."

"Yes, it's all over," she said coming back and sitting in the chair. "Oh, how embarrassed and ashamed I am! I am so sorry. The pigs!" The girl's eyes lost their tired look and she spoke faster. "Always spying. Always snooping. Dirty minds."

"You know them?" I asked.

"No, not them. But then I do know them, too. All gendarmes are like this. Ever since Taierchwang, they've been snooping around. I'll tell you. We were getting along fine. Everyone working, trying to do something. Then we won the battle of Taierchwang. So what do they do? They send spies up here to see that everything's done according to the way the government wants it done. You make a speech and it has to be the way they wrote it in Hankow. And there's someone listening to you all the time. There's only a few girls in Hsuechow but there's a corps of gendarmes to watch them. So they follow you around looking at you and sneering at you. Then we all have to go in groups and someone watching over us all the time. If we go alone any place, they're going to report us. Then they go around to the hotels looking for singsong girls and entertainers. That's how it is. You heard those things he said about us."

"Didn't believe them," I said.

"Thank you."

"But why," I said angrily, "did he say those things about foreigners?"

"Oh, the officials are like that. . . . Jealous."

I felt the suggestion behind this and said: "Jealous of what?"

"Oh, they don't want you around. They think foreigners are slippery. A girl loses face if she's seen with a foreigner. It makes them mad. They're jealous. You might make love to the girl. You might have relations with her. You might do anything. They think you're all so slippery that you must be paying a girl to have relations with you. So when a girl's seen with a foreigner, they accuse her of being a spy."

"Well, who are you?" I asked.

"This is Hua and this is Wang and my name is Wang, too."

"Sisters?"

"No. Just the same character. Three drops of water Wang—that Wang."

"How can I tell you apart? What's your first name?"

"Yingli."

The girl blushed. The question, indiscreet in Chinese, embarrassed her. The deep flush added considerably to her attractions. She seemed to be glowing with an inner vitality that threw the other two girls into the shade. Her hands were tense, thin and muscular; her skin was alive and sharp with color. She wore a simple silver

ring on one finger. The lobes of her ears were pricked with holes but she wore no earrings, which would have appeared incongruous with her cotton khaki uniform. She looked gay, smart and a little rough in the soldier's outfit; but her clothes fitted her tightly and there was a sort of quivering femininity to her roughness. She had a trick, which I noticed even then, of holding her mouth slightly ajar while her lips grew moist and she appeared to be breathless. Her appearance filled me with pleasure. I lay stress on this physical attractiveness, because I think her kind of tingling vitality was a thing apart from the oily and quiet beauty of the average Chinese woman. It was also a tribute to the essentially inner quality of her nature that the physical itching she at first aroused was soon swept off its feet and away by the compelling force of some indefinable quality that seemed to swell up inside her. I suppose it was passion. It was something that caused me pain. She was too intense. She wasn't pretty. The other girls, younger, unformed, were nonentities beside her.

"And so you see," Yingli was saying, "we heard a foreign reporter was here. Thought we would visit you. Find out what you think of the war. Please tell us also how we can improve ourselves."

"Is that why you came? But just who are you? These uniforms. . . ."

"Oh, they come from the Fifth War District.⁴ We are members of the Woman's Mobilization Committee," said Yingli.

She then related how she had run away from school in 1937 and gone to Hankow to join a war service unit.

"And what are you doing in Hsuechow?"

"We organize the women," said the girl named Hua.

"What's that mean?"

"It doesn't mean anything," said Yingli in a bitter tone. "We are the Women's Mobilization Committee, but we organize the children, not the women."

"What do you mean?"

"There are no women. There is no one who understands war service work. And now it's worse than ever. In the air raids, there's no one to do this work. The army hasn't time. The poor people are still here. There is no one to get them moving. No one to help them pack, to tell them where to go. No one to bind up their wounds, or

⁴ For the purpose of command, the Chinese early divided the country into nine or ten war areas. The Fifth War District, embracing the provinces of Anhui, Kiangsu and Shantung, was commanded by General Li Tsung-jen.

lead them to a hospital. No one to keep up the spirit of the soldiers. We are too few. We can't do anything. We try to find refugee children and send them back to Hankow, but now with these air raids our work is useless."

"Well, that's too bad," I said lamely.

"Oh, Mr. Pai, they kill so many of us," said the girl named Hua.

"They're beasts," said Wang.

"Devils," said Hua. "What do they think about when they kill us?"

"They would drink our blood," cried Yingli. "They are without mercy and without pity—inhuman and bloody monsters. They fight against all the rules of international warfare. They bomb helpless people. No military objectives."

"Oh, Christ! She's a propagandist, too!" thought I, writhing to hear her prattle this stale hash of the politicians. This urgent-breasted girl who ought to be lying in my arms—instead of giving me a rodomontade about the rules of war.

"Listen!" I said. "What's the use of preaching about the laws of warfare, chivalry, military objectives, international treaties, humanity? What has war to do with these things? You people are bombed and you object to it. Why? If I told you to stop fighting the Japanese, you'd be insulted. Yet as long as you keep on fighting, you must expect to be bombed. What is war, but the killing of people? That is its avowed aim—kill as many of the enemy as possible. If you don't want to be killed, why do you fight the Japanese? If you don't want to spill blood, give up waging war. But blood is war and war is blood. Of what use are the arguments of false generosity and shrinking girls?"

Yingli's face was drowned in angry pools of blood. "Shrinking girls!" she cried in a heavy voice. "Oh, my sweet philosopher, we have no place to shrink to. Philosophy is cheap from neutrals. Neutrals may run away like shrinking girls any time they like. I made a gesture of deprecation. "Oh, you may sneer at us all you like. . . ."

"No," I said. "There's not breath enough in me to sneer. . . ."

A hand pulled at my sleeve and I turned to see the other two girls, with white faces, ghostly dim in the dirty light, working hard.

"You don't know what you're talking about," said Hua. "It's imperialism that makes you that way. You are an American imperialist." She began to sniffle, brushing at her nose.

"How can you talk like this?" said the third girl. "Are you a Fas-

cist? Don't you know this is Fascism just like in Europe? Did you see how fast the planes flew today? They were Italian planes."

"Yes," said Hua, "everyone knows those Italian Fascist robbers are helping the Japanese."

"And their missionaries are spying on us."

I thought: "Even these young girls can be vicious." Aloud I said: "I don't believe you. Seven Italian missions have been bombed in a week. How is that? Bomb went right through the picture of Christ in the mission at Chengchow. How is that? The Italian fathers give refuge to your people and you accuse them of being spies? Nonsense."

"Well, maybe it's not the Italians, it's the Fascists," said Hua, snuffling again.

"These Fascists are destroying China," said Chang. "Are you a Fascist, you . . . ?"

"Oh, you're eating bean curd," said Yingli. "You sound like the gendarmes."

I felt her earnestness beneath her banter. And I lowered my voice to a serious tone. "No, I'm not a Fascist," I said, turning to the younger girl.

It was shadowy and dark in the room. It was hard to see. There was a tense stir on the bed. Yingli's form rolled over. Then suddenly she was sitting up, hot, passionate words gushing forth from her eager mouth.

"Fascists, Communists, politics—names, nothing but names; but what are names in the face of this? Bombs, things screaming at us out of the air. Running away; always running away from those things screaming at us. And if we are not running away, waiting and listening with our ears wide open—for the alarm. Whooooooooo, wh-o-o-o-o-o. On edge every minute. Waiting for what? A sound that will make us run. Afraid to take off our clothes at night because we don't know when we will have to get up and run away. Suffering, degradation, humiliation, dirt; blood running on the streets and no one to stop its flow. Ghoulish forces terrorizing us, knocking us down, tearing our limbs from their sockets, blowing up our abdomens so that excreta flow on the street and Hsueh is purified by the smell of war."

"War is like this," I said. "All wars are like this. Not just your war. All wars."

"All wars!" she said. "Like this? No, no, no. We know all wars

are terrible. That we know. But this is different. This is terrible because we fight and fight and fight and die and die and die—for what? For our land? No, no. We have no land. For our nation? It must be the nation. We struggle for the nation. And we are purified in the struggle. That's what we are told. We are purified. But let me ask you: for what are we purified—the four hundred million of us—for what? For whom? For the officials? For the Kuomintang? For the San Min Chu I?⁵ Will the San Min Chu I come and bind up the people's wounds tonight? Will it drag the dead into the grave? Will it nurse the baby that has lost its mother? Will it press the head of the wounded, bitter soldier against its breast as I have done?"

"Your country should be proud of you," said I.

"Proud!" Yingli spat out the word scornfully. "What have I done? What can I do? What can the three of us do?"

"Well, we can do our duty," said Hua, positively, as if this was a point she had just discovered. The Wang girl shook her head righteously. "Yes, we can do our duty."

"Yes," said Yingli, sardonically. "The government makes the orders and we do the work. Undoubtedly, it is a very wise scheme. But what the government cannot understand," she suddenly broke out, instinctively raising her voice, "is that it is degrading to live without producing an effect. I am intelligent enough to be degraded and I produce nothing. Can the government understand this? We are too few to accomplish anything—a handful of girls trying to put patches on a rotten machine. We need thousands of women, but where are they—our mealy-mouthed patriotic women dressed in silken clothes that hide the dispassionate soul of a singsong girl? How often have I seen their pictures in the papers—truly elegant in their expensive uniforms bought for the occasion! Madame So-and-so inaugurating the women's Patriotic League; Mrs. What-do-you-call-her just after starting a movement to get schoolchildren to write 50,000 letters to soldiers at the front. What's happened to the League? Where are the letters? The only things they ever wrote were speeches to conceal their lack of action. But the war has made them act, and they have to do things and cannot help themselves; and when it's all done and they've exhausted every effort to prevent its being done, they hold a procession and have a meeting and *pa ma pi* and talk about Spiritual Resistance and Look At What We've

⁵ Three People's Principles of Dr. Sun Yat-sen.

Done. And then they go away and form a committee and hang a sign on the door and make each other president or secretary. 'Woman's Cultural Association.' 'The Women's Antiaggression League for Comforting Wounded Soldiers.' 'The Association for Taking Care of Air-raid Victims.' Where are the workers of these organizations? Where are they? Why don't we see them in Hsuehchow? Why don't they come to Hsuehchow? Why are they never at the front? We know where they are. They are in Hankow trying to stroke the ass of Madame Chiang and Dr. Kung and the foreign missionaries. This is what 'Mobilize the People' means."

The other two girls gazed in astonishment at Yingli whose face was now ablaze, her eyes shining through strands of hair that had fallen about her crimson cheeks.

"This is terrible talk," said Hua. "How can you speak this way in front of a foreigner? I won't listen to you. Don't listen to her, Mr. Pai."

"Why shouldn't he listen to me?" She put her hand on my arm and, letting it slide downward, seized me tightly by the wrist. "Why shouldn't you listen to me? Or would you rather listen to those people and those speeches they parade for you at the press conferences? Oh, I know. This is what 'Mobilize the People' means to them. Give the foreigners a speech and that means the people are mobilized. This is the only thing 'Mobilize the People' means, but you don't know. You don't know anything. I've seen you foreign newspapermen before. They translate what you send abroad and put it in our papers. It must be very pleasing to our officials. But it doesn't please me and it wouldn't please our people if they could read. What is the good of all these stories? What is the good of all you newspapermen sending out picture stories to be read by comfortable people in civilized countries? Is this going to help us? Have we received any help? Why don't you rouse the conscience of the officials of our country; make them lose face; demand that they do something so that our people can fight this awful devil that is in our country? But, no! You sit here and write out your telegrams about Japanese marching against this flank and Chinese moving on that flank 'according to reliable sources'—'The Chinese are preparing to counterattack'—and so on. But when you see us murdered in our homes, you just say: 'Hsuehchow bombed, ten killed'—not that I blame you particularly, because our papers do the same—but you don't write the reality, the truth, the fact that our people are not free to fight off this thing that

is suffocating them, and never will be free until people like you and all the rest of the propagandists stop sending their half-truths and their social lies and reveal what is actually going on. Oh, if I had your chance. . . ."

She broke off. A sobbing gasp caught in her throat.

"We've got to have something. We can't go on always alone—alone."

She gave a cry and sank back on the bed shaking. I went over and sat on the edge of the bed. "I know, I know," I said, taking her hand. Her nails clawed into my fingers. She was on fire.

"She has been working too hard lately," said Hua coming over to the bed. "You must not mind what she says, Mr. Pai."

"But I assure you that I believe her. There are many things wrong with your country. . . ."

"But, Mr. Pai," said Hua, "you must understand China is a feudal country. Things move slowly." She came over and patted Yingli on the shoulder. "Never mind, Yingli, *man man lai*."

Yingli swung up like a tigress, snarling at the other girl who drew back in astonishment and fear, before her bared teeth and tear-raddled face.

"*Man, man, lai!* You silly child! You're just like the rest of them. *Man, man, lai!* How often have I heard those words! How often are the cries of progress gagged with this cowardly rag of passivity! 'It's coming. It's coming.' 'China is a feudal country.' 'China is backward.' 'A house can't be built in a day.' '*Man man lai*.' Words springing from the mouths of officials. The people ask for freedom, for food, for protection, and the officials give them—words. How many times have we been told to listen to these words of the officials and not make trouble for the government!"

"And yet somebody must lead the people," spoke up Wang, as if she had just made a most brilliant remark.

"And anyway," said I getting up, "this always happens in war and everyone gives up certain liberties and obeys orders of the government for the common good."

"Yes, but with this difference," said Yingli more soberly. "In China, nobody is allowed to get on the job. Nobody is allowed to do anything. China is holding her womb in both her two hands and crying with the pains of a brutal raping, but nobody is allowed to do anything about it, because the government is going to do it. The government is going to do the job when it gets around to it and

when 'China is not a feudal country.' There are no plans to utilize our enormous man power. Nobody is allowed to help. In fact, everyone must be discouraged from expressing his opinion of the war, from showing his reaction to the invaders. And you can see this on any village wall in the posters they put up: 'The best way to repel the invader is to keep local order and obey the magistrate.' What does this mean? In reality, it means: do nothing. But we don't disturb the order the authorities are so anxious to keep; it is the Japanese who disturb the order; and the people are left defenseless because nobody is allowed to get to work! And when the Japanese come, the wounded soldiers are left behind, the refugees flee to the hills and starve while another association hangs out another sign at Hankow. The whole country needs to be cleansed; and nobody is allowed to go to work, because we 'have only one enemy.' What kind of people make these slogans? Are they so different from us that they have no understanding? Do they think that slogans are emotions? Can they ever know that our people are moved by emotions and not slogans? Can they ever know that the people won't rise up just because they draw a slogan on the wall: 'Rally Around The Leader'; 'Unite Under The Kuomintang'? Can they ever know that our people react to primitive urges—hunger, fear, love—which they feel and know to be true, and not to the false urges that a disinterested government publishes for them? No, they can't as long as they look upon the people as illiterate beasts. But these slogan-makers feed on the illiterate. They feed on disease. They feed on the dead. But with this they are not satisfied; for they must tell us what good they are doing for the people. This is propaganda. But we know what they are really doing. They are doing nothing. They don't dare come to Hsuechow. This is utter degradation. This is shame. This is China's misery."

The girl had worked herself up again, but she broke off. A spasm in her throat choked her, and she walked up and down silently for a moment, struggling for breath. When she spoke again, it was in a quieter tone, but her glittering eyes and trembling lips were traitor to her enforced calm.

"You must excuse me. Had no intention of talking to you like this. I do not like to mention these things to a foreigner. This is our business and not yours. These things lie deep but sometimes they won't stay down. These are not my opinions. These things are so. You may believe me when I say so. I know you have felt or seen

some of this yourself, because you cannot miss it if you travel in the interior. But people in Hankow do not know what is going on. They think it is their duty to give speeches and save the country. And all the missionaries think this is wonderful and that China is being reborn. If you could only see what I have seen. If you only knew what the people have to stand. If you will only come with me, perhaps I can show you. I have to pick up refugee children. You think it is easy, but it is not. How many of these children have died on the way, and how many of them have been sold by their mothers and fathers into slavery! You think, therefore, it is easy to get them. But forgive me; my wandering talk tires you—I am tired myself—too many air raids. . . .” She gave a nervous laugh. “But come with me to the country and see; come with me tomorrow.”

“Yes, I shall come,” I promised.

“But you must come before daylight. I don’t think I could stand another air raid.” The girl shook her head in an attempt at merriment. “Meet you at the Hai-Cheng road outside of town at five thirty.” She walked quickly to the door and went out, followed by the two other girls—sort of *chair à canon*, I thought.

7

Yingli’s outbursts against the hypocritical do-nothingism of the Hankow government no doubt bore the stamp of outraged youthful idealism, but they none the less carried the imprint of reality. The difficulties in the way of anything being accomplished—say, by the Women’s Mobilization Committee—lay, however, not only in governmental attitudes, but in fundamental, social and economic conditions existing in northern Kiangsu Province where an impotent Kuomintang shrank from facing realities and consequently became a partner to the weakened resistance resulting from the deceptions and iniquitous oppressions that were thrust upon the very people who were supposed to cooperate in opposing the enemy.

The peasants—a class from which all the soldiers were drawn, from which came 90 per cent of the refugees and a goodly portion of the air-raid victims, and consequently a class in which war service work should have found a wide application—these peasants in northern Kiangsu were no different in language, costume and manners than most of the peasants of the rest of north China, but they did live in a harsher economic environment and consequently had

a different social outlook on life, politics and war; some people even went so far as to say that the criminals and gangsters of Shanghai were all bred in Kompo.⁶ Yet people like Yingli did full justice to their laborious habits, their essentially honest characteristics and fundamental friendliness, but at the same time were forced to recognize that the peasants did not respond to formal slogans, patriotic appeals and threats of Japanese atrocities as did the people in the southern half of the province. The presence of soldiers among them, the doings of war-service workers, their dramas, their speeches, their meetings and their appeals, while occasionally arousing a bit of dull peasant interest, often and in many cases aroused suspicion and fostered native rusticity and exclusiveness, and instead of *chauvinising* them, if we may coin a word, increased their already deep suspicion of the literate and educated classes. The most extraordinary hate and fear of the ruling classes passed as common currency among them: all the time they were on the alert to see that the propaganda speeches of the students did not include some hidden message of increasing rents and masked threats of dispossession; then they would listen politely to that famous sugared honey of the Hankow slogan-writers about "those with money, give money, and those with strength, give strength"; and they would go back to their planting, thinking all the while that soon the landlords would be around to take their sons off to the wars; while most of them, when they found that the propagandists were not talking about reducing the rents, shut their ears to the speeches and went on existing from day to day.

At the present moment, the peasants found all the dice loaded against them. Not being able to obtain credit, they were on the verge of starvation. This was especially true of the peasant in the areas close to Hsuchow. The officials and the banks and the merchants, holding most of the actual cash, had in many cases folded their tents and stolen away, so that these supplies of credit were shut off at the source; the landlords who had the tremendous reserves of grain preferred to sell to the army rather than take a chance on the harvest of the peasants, for, not knowing when Hsuchow might fall, they were unwilling to gamble on the Japanese leaving the crops to the rightful owners; the rich farmers who had grain in reserve were not willing to lend it out for the same reason and for the additional reason that they were selling their reserves of grain hand over fist

⁶ Area north of the Yangtze River.

to the army quartermasters or losing it in requisition. And at this very moment, in the spring of 1938, when the harvest gave promise of being one of the most bountiful in years, the peasants, who in any case would have been robbed by the usurers, landlord agents, grain sellers and local market tyrants, couldn't even gain a copper of credit from anyone, so that they were actually starving.

There was about Hsuehow a host of villages. These parts of Kiangsu, Shantung and Anhui, especially along the cool, placid affluence of the Grand Canal, were rich and creamy with people. The ground was thick with towns and marts. And about each village was a congeries of hamlets, mud and plaster huts, occasional farm-houses of stone and other rich material, the houses where all the people lived, concealed by the softness of green massed trees, islands upon a softly undulating sea of waving grain. There seemed to be a kind of center at the village where all the people crawled in waiting for the landlord's agent with his robber weighing scales, and where militiamen with huge, firm straw hats and rifles slung across their broad shoulders wandered up and down. But today the people were not coming to the village with their grain, for it was spring.

The spring was ripe. Small gusts of wind were blowing, turning the grain now this way, now that way, and making sibilant music through all the strings of the grass and green-bladed barley.

Yingli and I, Hua and Chang leisurely made our way along the morning-cool paths, and the girls softly sang a new war song:

Springtime—a hundred flowers unclasp their lips.
The Japanese devil-robbers have seized our land.
Men and women, old and young, make your flowers one
strong bunch;
Don't let the devil-soldiers cross before our eyes:
Oh, come all my countrymen together,
Mountains and plains spread guerrilla warfare.

The enchantment of the day overwhelmed me. The land was like a garden; the girls were Eves in Paradise; the wind sprayed a clean fragrance over the worn, bare paths dividing the plots of growing grain. Small houses dotted the land; there were fields of green-yellow barley bending rhythmically under the wind. Out of this loveliness loomed the huge stone turret of a landowner's house with firm walls around a courtyard. As we went under the shadow of the walls, Yingli chanted in nonsense fashion: "Who's in love with the

big landlord? Who's in love with the big landlord?" Her voice bounded against the walls. We passed around and stood at the wooden gate looking through into a yard full of straw; a horse was in the stable. No human was about. Not even a knight or an imprisoned lady peering beseechingly out of the narrow window in the great stone column of the castle house. We went on. A young fellow swayed by us with a carrying pole over his shoulder and the two baskets hanging by cords were filled with heaping greens. He grinned with a cordial sweating face, saluting us with a heavy grunt. A woman in a field stared up at us from bended knees, her two hands resting on the ground. In another field, pulling on a water wheel, a mule went around in his endless, senseless, blind journey.

We moved around the square of the field turning sharply, right angledly on the grass-bare footpath into a wider walk, and there we were before a house of dappled brick and stone and mud. An old man was there.

"Ah, you ladies are having a hard time, indeed. And this foreigner, too. Drink tea. Drink tea."

Bit by ingenious bit the girls brought the talk around to the war, and bit by bit they explained the history of the Japanese invasion of China.

"If there is a War of Resistance,⁷ only then can China exist, only then can there be good days for the people to pass. If the people help the soldiers, then the war will be won."

Simply, sincerely they told their story; how "100,000" people had been killed by bombs, how children had been carried off in great ships to Japan; how women—even women over fifty—had been raped; and the few people listened politely, then avidly and finally a great rushing anger overtook them.

"Go! Fight the Devils!" cried a young man.

"One who won't fight the Devils isn't a man," said another.

And an old man spoke up: "If there are really these kind of affairs going on, I don't want this old life of mine. The only way is to go out and fight with them."

And at another group of houses, the girls told the story again, and an old man broke the communal silence with a nod of approval.

"These girls are all right. They tell us in detail. Our Paochang⁸

⁷ Kang Chan, Resistance War, is the official and popularly accepted name of China's war against Japan.

⁸ Head of a hundred families.

and our Chiachang⁹ only know how to take money from us. Today, ten cents; tomorrow, five cents. If we knew it was for ourselves, we'd take out the money right away."

"Again, they say they want us to go out and be soldiers and fight the Japanese. Well, that's all right. It's not that we don't want to, but it ought to be more just. What do you think of this affair? Those with money only have to give a little and they don't have to give money either. But listen to this. In the east there is the little home of Wang. There are just woman and son. She depends on him to live. But they came to conscript him. Little Wang begged the Paochang to wait until he could settle the old woman and then he would go to be a soldier. But do you think they would wait? Do you know what that Paochang told Wang? He said: 'The command from above has come for a man. Who has time to wait for you?'"

And out once more on the paths Yingli marched on, muttering over and over again: "What kind of a way is this to mobilize men? What kind of a way?"

The sun moved up higher. The gusts of wind tiring of their sport returned to their Aeolian caves for a siesta, leaving the splendid clouds becalmed on the blue-sky sea. The virginal spring morning grew limp with the passion of an elder day and lay panting on a bed of heat, languorous like some woman who has just been loved. Everywhere was abundance: the green wheat and barley blades were thick over the earth, drawn up in serried ranks, millions and millions of tassel-headed soldiers one back of the other, partitioned into squares for miles and miles, food for numberless days and myriad peoples.

We left the path and cut across the fields moving knee-high through the slender waving grain, gathering on our clothing bits of straw and wisps of yellow grass. All the field was sown with barley and here and there were huge red radishes and they were ripe and we ate them, quenching our thirst. Then we emerged from the grass; forest again, coming onto barren plots of earth and bare wide paths that led to a bright island of green where through the massed trees were seen the mud walls and thatched huts of a small village.

Suddenly, the distant humming of planes was heard and we broke into a little run and took shelter in the small grove of trees outside the village. There we lay down in the brown earth, lazily contemplating our surroundings; and the humming grew louder, roaring into our ears, then gradually dying down and passing away slowly

⁹ Head of ten families.

like a wail in the distance until it could be heard no more. We lay on our backs, looking up through the green shimmer of the leaves at the blue sea of the sky with its fleet of cloudy ships again in motion. There was a small rustling noise above and behind us, coming near as on little feet. We turned on our sides and looked and there was a young girl in a blue gown picking the coarse leaves from a tree and putting them in her blouse. We stared at her.

"That's not a mulberry tree," said Yingli softly. "What can she be picking these leaves for? Can it be for medicine?"

Yingli called to the girl.

"What are you picking these leaves for?"

"To eat."

"How strange! Do you really eat leaves?"

Yingli called the girl over and gently pulled her down on the ground beside her. She was only about eight or nine years old, very tiny, with bound feet.

"And can you really eat the leaves from this tree?" said Yingli with a tone of high make-believe. Her air was one of exaggerated adult wonder.

"There's nothing to eat. No way." The child's tone was matter-of-fact.

"But the grain you planted. . . ."

"Last year's is all gone and this year's is not yet ripe."

The wind whispered through the silken dresses of the wheat, and the reeds bent rhythmically in a dance, making soft music with the rustle of their green-clad legs. Involuntarily, I turned to look, and my eyes coming back along all the shapely lines of the disciplined grain stalks met those of Yingli and clung to them embarrassed at the depths of accusation in them.

"There, Mr. Reporter," she said, her voice low and her words soft like the whisper of the wind, "there is Chung Hua Min Kuo for you. There is great China for you. 'Last year's is all gone and this year's is not yet ripe.' Oh, you have a lot to learn. This girl can teach you more than all the Madame Chiang Kai-sheks in the world." Her voice took on a rising tone and broke out in a sharp crack. "Listen."

"Why do you bind your feet?"

The little girl opened her mouth in astonishment and then looked down at the unbound feet of Yingli, Hua and Chang.

"If you don't bind your feet, nobody will want you for a wife."

A group of women coming out of the trees as if by magic now

stood around us. I threw my eye around the circle and saw that the feet of all the women from four to sixty were bound. I ran my eye up all the filthy blue cotton ladders of their legs and I saw that they were staring at me.

"Is there anyone here who recognizes characters?" asked Yingli.

"How could girls know characters?" said a young woman.

"Are there any schools here?"

"No." Sullenly.

The peasants moved uneasily, shifting from foot to foot. The questions to them seemed foolish and needless. They were suspicious, watchful. Yingli turned to me.

"There you are, my Mr. Pai. Go and write your articles about great China. Go and interview this official and that general. But look at this: girls have bound feet. See how they cannot walk, only hobble. Nobody knows any characters. There are no schools. What can China as a nation mean to them? But worse—they have nothing to eat. They eat leaves. Write that down. Or won't it look good in your newspaper? See how suspicious they are. How stupid we must seem with our questions about schools and characters!"

There was a stir in the little group, for she spoke these words loud enough so others could hear.

She turned back to them, fixing them with a glance to draw their attention. Then she said in a portentous voice: "The Japanese may come; how have you prepared yourselves?" Silence. I saw that everyone's face was grave at the question and all eyes fell before Yingli's restless gaze. She repeated the question: "How have you prepared yourselves?" Still no reply. With an agitated shrug of her shoulders, the girl abruptly changed the question. "Are there any refugees here?"

"Oh, yes. There are lots of them from the north."

We walked into the village. There must have been 300 people living in the twenty or thirty houses. Not far away and in a little grove of trees by itself was a large stone house, with a huge hall, immense supporting stone pillars and high towering ceilings like a castle of the Middle Ages, hard and rich with stone floors which were swarming and alive with stricken and filthy refugees. They lay on the floor, on old patched quilts, on boards, benches and tables amid piles of straw, fragments of decayed vegetables, near pools of green stagnant water, sick men, women and children, rotten in bundles of rags, their bodies covered with great open sores, their

necks, feet and hands gashed greatly with scabies, red and bleeding, while rat-haired children tossed on their beds muttering incoherently as their eyes nervously sought the meaning of some wild dream.

There was a stir in the human maggot cells as we walked into this dolorous stinking hall. Women came with babies in their arms and to my unspeakable horror fell on their knees before me crying out: "Holy Father, Holy Father, a little medicine to give my child to eat." How easy to see that once they had come in contact with a Catholic missionary! And I backed away in fear and shock as the scabby little hands of the children grabbed at me and yelled in mimicry of their elders: "Medicine! Medicine! Medicine!"

Yingli walked around the mixed mass of faces, old and young, chattering idly, calmly indifferent to the filth on all sides of her, and at last coming to two long steps at one end of the great room, she mounted them and with her head thrown back began to speak.

"You from the same womb as I, listen! How miserable you are! My heart beats for you. The war has ruined you; we have all fared alike. You have come a long way, but still you are not safe. Your children are not safe for the enemy advances. You must give us your children. We shall take them away to a safe place, far from the fighting where they will live quietly with plenty to eat."

She paused and sighs arose here and there from the crowd.

"I am acting on your behalf. For your good. For the good of the children."

She paused again. No one spoke.

"The same misfortune has ruined us all. Let us then join together. All of us are Chinese. Better to give your children to Chinese than to let them fall in the hands of the Japanese Devils. We shall take your children to Hankow and put them in school. Come, give me your children," she ended, stretching out her hands and looking in their faces. Their eyes were fixed on her, secretive, unanswering. The meaning they held was unfathomable.

"We are grateful to you for your kindness," said a voice at last. "No doubt you have come many thousand li¹⁰ to do this work, but you shall not have our babies."

"Why?" said Yingli. Silence. She looked around the hall and their eyes fell before her glance but still they were hard. "Why do you refuse?" Still no reply. Even in the dark light I could see her breast rising and falling with agitation and I felt the passion of her

¹⁰ The Chinese measure of distance, about one-third of a mile.

growing. She turned to a young woman sitting before her with a child lying on a quilt by her side and she addressed herself directly to her: "Why will you not send your baby to a safe place? Why?" The woman fingered her frayed blue blouse and bent down her eyes, muttering: "Why should we give you our children? You want us to sacrifice everything to you and we don't want to. What do you want so many children for anyway?" She cried out in a sudden burst of curious anger, raising her head and looking at the girl.

"Yes! Yes!" said several voices. "What do you want so many children for?"

"You have not understood my meaning," said Yingli with a melancholy smile. "We don't want children. We only want to take them away for your sake, for their own sakes. The enemy may come any day now and you will have to run. If you can't run, your children will fall into the Devils' hands. The Devils will kill them. If they don't they will carry them off to Japan as slaves. You will never see them again. But don't fear. We have come in time. Your children shall be well cared for in Hankow."

"Where is there a good person to do any such thing as you describe?" cried a mother, eyeing all three girls suspiciously and clutching her son to her.

"We will give you a receipt for your child," said Yingli patiently. "Come to Hankow yourself. See him. Take him back if you want to. Only don't leave him here for the Devils."

"Go to Hankow?" a voice cackled from one of the columns. "And how are we going to get to Hankow? Who has that much money?"

"Why," said Yingli, "why do you object to giving me your children when I promise you that they shall be kept well and fed? If they are left here, the enemy will enslave them."

But the cries and murmurs of the crowd drowned her voice.

"You can't have my child. I will beg for food. One mouthful of grain a day is enough to keep him alive. If I die, I shall not part with my child."

One buxom woman with three children gathered them in her arms and shouted out at Yingli: "Who are you that comes around wanting other people's children? Why don't you lay in bed with some man if you are so anxious to have children?"

"Yes," cried an old lady. "Who are you? Who is this foreigner you have brought with you? Did he put you up to this? Does he want to buy and sell our children?"

Yingli tried to make herself heard but it was in vain. The temper of the crowd rose. There were cries on all sides.

"Won't give you children. Let him come. Let him kill us. Won't give you children. You shall not have our children."

Suddenly, Yingli exploded, jumping high in the air and throwing her arms wide. "Stop!" she roared. "Fools! Cowards!" Her anger boiled over and the crowd drew back at the flood of passion which streamed forth from her flaming face and quivering body. "Listen to me, fools! You have run away. Why? Because you were afraid of the Japanese Devils. You were right. But if you run again this time and don't escape what will happen to your children? What? Answer me! I'll tell you. The Japanese will seize them. Understand? Seize them in their big bloody hands. Your son and your daughter, if they live, will be sent to Japan. They will be slaves of the Japanese. Pull the Japanese ploughs around the fields while the Japanese beat them with whips. Understand? The Japanese will tell your sons and daughters to hate the Chinese. Understand? The Japanese will send your daughters into whore houses and your sons heaven knows where. You must save your children. Can't you understand this? If you won't understand, I have to make you. I demand from you your children. I demand you give me your children. I demand it for their sake and the sake of China. China's children must be saved so they can fight the Japanese. So they can revenge their fathers and mothers. So they can revenge you and me. Don't allow your children to become slaves of these dwarf robbers. They will curse you forever."

The murmurs of the crowd would not be drowned by this speech.

"She's a great talker, she is! Thinks she'll take us in, does she? She's a sly one, she is! Crazy, I think, her getting so angry. With that foreigner, too."

But suddenly out of the midst of the crowd and the cries stepped a woman, pale, thin, and calm. About thirty, she was clad in a long gray gown. Her figure was finely drawn: she seemed washed and clean. Her eyes were soft, candid, sad. Her thin features quite unlike those of the suspicious peasant women lying in heaps on the floor were illumined by a smile. Her face seemed an altar where sorrow and delicate determination worshiped. In her hand was the hand of a boy, about nine years old.

Saint and cherubim, they came before the angry girl goddess flushed upon the stone steps.

"I will give you my son."

The woman's voice was low and tense but it carried through the hall like the tones of an avenging angel. A sigh whirled up from the crowd. Then the hall became still.

The woman bent down and placed her cheek against the boy's.

"Little Jewel, the Japanese robbers stole your mother. Remember. Always."

She gave him a little convulsive hug. She turned around without a word. She vanished into the crowd, leaving the boy standing before Yingli, alone, silent.

Silently before the wondering eyes of the crowd, Yingli led the boy out of the castle into the gloriously dying world, the triumphant sunset and the whispering wheat, sending code messages along the million massed antennae: "... stole your mother. Remember. Always." Silently we made our way back to the great city of Hsuehchow.

8

Some days after Yingli, the girls and I returned from our visit to the countryside, the Japanese began to close in on Hsuehchow. From both the north and south they developed a great pincer movement which the Chinese seemed powerless to halt.

On May 12, General Li Tsung-jen, commander in chief of the Chinese forces around Hsuehchow, suddenly received information which made him realize that his army of 300,000 to 400,000 men in the Hsuehchow area was in a position approaching checkmate. A Japanese tank unit, operating far in advance of the main body of enemy troops, had cut the Lunghai Railway bridge at Hwangchow, twenty miles to his west and deprived him of his only railroad supply line. At the same time, the Japanese forces, 180,000 strong, coming from the north and south, were marching to fortify this interception. Soon the Japanese erected west of Hsuehchow a great barrier extending from Shantung Province in the north across the Lunghai Railway into Anhui Province in the south. General Li with all his forces was shut up between this barrier and the sea; his supply lines had been intercepted and his retreat cut off. If he elected to wait at Hsuehchow until reinforcements could reopen the railway line, Li ran the risk of having the northern and southern Japanese armies gradually hem him in, starve him of ammunition, surround

him and either cut him to pieces or force him into ineffectual guerilla warfare. If he decided to abandon his hold on Hsuehchow, his only recourse was to retreat, breaking through the Japanese enveloping line into the sandy plains of Honan Province and effecting a junction with other forces to continue resistance in the interior.

While Li Tsung-jen was debating on the best course of action, Hsuehchow was thrown into an uproar. The news that they were cut off came as a profound shock and surprise to everyone. The headquarters of Li, itself behindhand in its own intelligence, had contrived to conceal the seriousness of the situation from the War Service Corps workers, from the boys and girls in the theatrical troupes and from the people. The result—all were caught in the city. Trapped. They were frightened.

Among those caught were Yingli and some girls of the Women's Mobilization Committee. By now Yingli was caring for thirty to forty children. The Japanese lately had been dropping incendiary bombs on the towns and villages and on Hsuehchow, and the bombings had succeeded, where Yingli's words had failed, in making the people want to get their children away. Terrified out of their suspicions, mothers had brought their children to Yingli as one brings jewelry to a safe deposit box. Only they expected Yingli to take their young jewels away to a safe place. And she had promised. These educated girls had contracted to safeguard the lives of the children. They had done more than that: by speechifying and propagandizing they had lured mothers into giving up their children. Mothers had been robbed of their children. . . . For what?

The Women's Mobilization Committee no doubt would have evacuated with their charges if they had been informed in time of the seriousness of the situation. But how could these young girls know anything? Who would tell them? The military was so laboring under the historic delusion that in times of crisis it is necessary not to alarm the people, not to give them one hint of the danger that threatens them—in other words, keep them so calm until the last moment that they cannot make a move to save their own lives—that these children who at least might have been in their mother's arms were now caught like the army. But while the army could fight its way out, these children could do nothing but get tangled in everyone's feet. And this was at a time when every foot, poised to run to the rear, kicked in panic at anything that might trip it up.

The children in Yingli's care were dressed in dirty and torn cloth-

ing; they had exceptionally bright eyes; some of them had a little schooling; most of them were peasant children, without any education whatsoever. Like all Chinese children, they were quiet, almost tragically wise in their owl-like silence; none of them cried, none of them yelled; they all wished to listen to orders. When the planes flew over, they stared wide-eyed at each other and huddled together, frightened: "Don't move," "Don't speak." To keep them busy when the planes were not overhead, the children were walked about the compound: "One, two, three, four, march."

The girls themselves did not know of the cutting of the Lunghai Railway at Hwangkow until the fourteenth of May. They now heard that the only train running was one to Suhsien, fifty miles south of Hsuehchow on the Tientsin-Nanking Railway. But they did not know that Japanese forces were west of the railway and that their safe passage across Kiangsu and Honan was blocked by the Japanese Army.

No, this is a military secret; don't tell them.

Yingli went to see a general in Li's headquarters.

Surprised to see a woman still about, he said: "I ought to lead you out of Hsuehchow, but I have no way."

"But it's not for us; it's for the children."

The general looked startled as if to say: "What's all this talk about children?"

"Please get a truck."

"There are no trucks."

There was a truck standing outside the general's door, and she asked him for it.

"That truck has an important use."

"Are children of no importance?"

As Yingli went out on the street, students were speaking to the people: "Those who can return to their homes had better do so. It is better to demobilize than mobilize."

Oh, yes, the posters were still on the wall. "Soldiers, People Rise Up Together!" "All People Mobilize against the Enemy!" "Resist to the End!" "Down with Japanese Imperialism!" "The Japanese Rape Women!" "Defend Your Ancestral Homes!" "Defend Great Hsuehchow!"

Yingli's heart was full, and to divert her mind from her sorrow, she undertook the thankless and tiring work of finding people to

direct the evacuation and safe disposal of natives of the villages about Hsuchow.

This was a hopeless job as the houses of the people were all upside down: doors were wide open, furniture packed in rickshas, rooms littered with hay, paper and sacks of grain which the peasants were carrying away with slow, heavy steps. The people shouted and squabbled and ran in and out of the houses upsetting everything and getting nothing done at all. The girls threw themselves into the fray. At first, everyone looked on them with suspicion, but when they persisted with a steadiness that at last convinced everyone, the people began to listen to their orders. Their first achievement was to get the people to leave behind those things that were not absolutely necessary and would only hamper them on the journey. Chairs, tables, beds, pigs, toilet pots—these and countless other things necessary to the home but useless on the road all had to be discarded. Blankets, bedding, grain and chickens the people were allowed to take.

"You can't take your home with you; you will find homes where you are going. Now pack this up, and off with you. Now, *hsiao pao pao*, take your mother's hand and go along."

The girls knew it was all very well to talk this way, but in their hearts they wondered what the refugees would do.

When they had worked until they were completely exhausted, they went back to their own house. The children were still there, fast asleep. "What to do with them?" They sat in silence, occasionally sighing, until the dawn came.

Then they went outside the city to find the officer in charge of their work.

"All he has to do is to give us permission to take the children with us."

They became excited all over again.

In a small village they found a secretary who connected them by phone with their officer.

"If there's a train leaving the city, the children may go," he said.

The girls were overcome with joy. They embraced each other and cried with happiness. "What a good man our officer is! We'll take these children to Hankow. We'll dress them up in fine clothes. Send them to school. . . ."

The Japanese planes hovered overhead, but the girls went back

into the city. Refugees, old and young, were already pouring out the east suburb. The road was full of soldiers. Dust from their tramping feet filled the air. The day was sultry and oppressive; sweat poured down the girls' cheeks; their hair was sticky and clung to their sweaty faces.

On the road they met a junior officer.

"Have you found the mission?" he said.

"What mission?"

"Well, you'd better take the children to a mission."

"But, if there is a way to escape from Hsuechow, we will take the children with us. That's what the officer promised us."

"You are an obstinate bunch. I know your difficulties. But look here; I'll tell you how things stand. The bridge at Hwangchow can't be repaired at a moment's notice. Even if it can be repaired, we have to pass through the enemy's lines, and the enemy is striking from both flanks. It's impossible to predict whether we can break through this line or not. Now are you willing to rush through the enemy line with the children, risking your lives under fire?"

The girls' hearts were numbed.

"But why weren't we told? Why weren't we told . . . ? Isn't there any way out?"

The young officer shrugged his shoulders and walked away.

Great confusion reigned during the night of the sixteenth of May. Some of the War Service Corps workers began making plans to evacuate with the army; others expressed worry over the safety of Yingli and her companions. But how to dispose of the children?

"Look," said a man drawing Yingli over in a corner, "you'd better start immediately for the southeast; you might reach Shanghai."

"Do you think we can take the children along?"

The man gave a knowing smile as if to say: "Are you crazy?" and walked away.

On May 17, the distant thunder of enemy cannon grew nearer. In despair, the girls went to the Presbyterian mission and asked the Chinese missionaries to take their children.

"I think our church will be safe for the moment," said the Chinese minister in a kindly voice. "We will find somebody to take care of the children."

At noon, a shell fell on the corner of the officers' lecture hall inside the city. Trees in the garden were uprooted. Soldiers of the

garrison ran out of Hsuehchow; the girls followed them. They went to Li's headquarters located in a garden outside the city. Japanese planes found them and released bomb after bomb. A sergeant-major and a member of the general staff were killed.

The three girls ran, abandoning everything. Yingli threw away her blanket on the highway.

Under a tree, where she had gone to take shelter, the girl found a child's ornament. She held it tightly, conjuring up the imaginary picture of the child who had owned it. The other two girls rushed to her side, burying their faces in her hair, their hot tears falling on her face.

"How much worse if the children had been with us! Is this how we must live, running away from planes, running away from children we took from their mothers' arms, swearing to protect them? Can we ever shout again: 'One, two, three, four,' at the children on the drill ground? How can I forget the sparkling small eyes of the children? How can I forget the grateful eyes of the mothers that gave us the children? Oh, don't let me see another child again as long as I live."

9

Having failed to reopen his rail communications and with the Japanese pressing closer in on him, Li Tsung-jen was now definitely committed to a retreat. Though there were three broad rivers in his line of proposed march, and though he ran the risk of being attacked in the rear with all his baggage at his heels, Li could no longer delay; for on his escape depended the fate of one-third of the organized Chinese Army and probably the fate of the Chinese Republic.

Using Hsuehchow and the Grand Canal as a pivot, he commanded his troops east of Hsuehchow to swing south and west while he remained in the city holding the line and directing the retreat.

The Chinese poured through Hsuehchow from the fourteenth of May on. Back from the front came the infantry, followed by the artillery, trucks and cars, with the wounded at the very rear. By nightfall all trace of men, cars and horses was gone. Only a few civilians trickled by on the streets.

But in the morning all those who didn't want to be slaves or didn't want to be caught in the hullabaloo of battle which they thought

was imminent in Hsuehchow began streaming out of the surrounding villages to join the river of refugees flowing into the country to the southeast. These people had no intention of following the army nor any intention of seeking the seat of the government at Hankow. Nor did the army drive them ahead of the infantry like "locusts" as many a foreign reporter, sitting in captured Shanghai, has claimed. They were following their natural instincts for safety and even in this negative way expressing their hate of the invader. The peasants, the poor shopkeepers and the people took the southeast road because at the immediate moment it was the safest road. The army took the road to the southwest. Thus they went in different directions: the army to break through the Japanese and resume the struggle on the other side; the refugees to avoid the Japanese and find some village where they could hole up until the storm had spent its strength and moved onto some other place.

Oxen, horses, donkeys were fleeing along the way. Some young men were carrying baggage and their household belongings, while others shouldered old men on their backs. Some had children in their arms, some had bedding and some carried their old mothers or their sick wives. Molecules of misery bumping and crowding into each other—an old woman with bound feet, a wrinkled patriarch sleeping in a cart—all fleeing destruction.

A young boy about eleven years old pursed his lips and sang:

How many years shall we wander?
To what place shall we flee?
Our ancestral home is torn and shaken:
We have no place to roam;
We have no place to flee.

As a small pebble thrown in a stream causes the water to spread out in a wide ripple, the song, caught up by a soldier here and a soldier there, spread in and out among the silently plodding refugees.

We have no place to roam;
We have no place to flee.

At this moment an army truck carrying a group of boys and girls of a War Service Corps began worming its way through the crowds on the road. Someone, evidently hearing the doleful accents of "Fleeing Destruction," lifted up his voice in another song and the whole War Service Corps took it up.

Come, come, come.
We must all rush together to the front,
Swearing to die in the War of Resistance.
Come, come, come;
Down with Japanese imperialism!
Fight for the freedom of the Chinese race.

The refugees turned puzzled and startled eyes on the truck as it went by with its group of singing boys and girls in uniform.

"Look," said one of the boys, "their hearts are also moved by this song. But what shall we do about these fleeing refugees? Can such a flight from destruction build resistance to the Japanese?"

Where are you fleeing yourself, young fellow?

"We mustn't let this sort of flight continue. We should organize the people. Give them the responsibility of protecting their own homes in land which they know. The people of Shantung, Anhui and Honan and other provinces have many spears and many arms. Why do we let the people run away?"

Where are you running to, young fellow?

"The enemy are better armed than we, but there are a number of conditions in our favor. We don't want to be slaves of a conquered country. Why don't we develop the strength of the people? That's the only guarantee of our final victory. In this country of ours—this China of ours—there are no great industries, no armament factories; if we don't organize the people, train them, then on what shall we depend for victory?"

The truck passed on; the refugees passed on. There was more than distance between them.

By the seventeenth of May, Hsuehchow was a dead city. The American flag was already pasted up on the gate of the American mission. Li Tsung-jen transferred his headquarters from the foot of Dragon Cloud Mountain to a garden in the south suburb. There Li and his chief of staff, Pai Chung-hsi, stood by the radio hour after hour directing the retreat of the army east of Hsuehchow.

At nine o'clock in the morning Japanese guns were dragged up on Tyrant King Hill and unlimbered. Shells began to fall on Three Mile Mountain just west of the city. Every officer and soldier in Li's headquarters attended to the packing up of vital documents and records. A scared crowd of reporters and War Service Corps workers belonging to the headquarters of the Fifth War District gathered in the garden outside Li's quarters. Somehow a truck was

found for them and they were sent away on the road south.

Airplanes attracted by the crowd loosed bombs on the headquarters and two of Li's staff officers were killed. Shells began to fall in the western sector of Hsuehchow outside the city.

Li and Pai Chung-hsi, however, went into Hsuehchow to superintend the blowing up of railway stock and to continue directing the retreat from the city. For the moment it was safer than their headquarters which had become a target for the planes.

At two o'clock shells began bursting about the east and north stations. Eventually, they again found Li and Pai out, and the twin generals went back to the suburbs in the gardens.

At half-past six in the evening Hsuehchow was smoldering. The streets were uncannily dark and deserted. Around the east station, which had been bombed for five days, there was not a clean spot to be seen, only blood, house wreckage, trash, bomb splinters, pieces of tin, railway ties. An early summer wind blew the smell of the dead along the street. It was quiet; not a dog barked. Hsuehchow was empty.

From the eastern suburbs came a column of men marching into the city which everyone else had left. At the head of the procession walked a man with a lantern; bareheaded and solemn he looked neither to the right nor left. Behind him came a number of stout fellows with carrying poles over their shoulders. They bore red swastikas on their armbands. They had been hired by the Buddhist Red Swastika Association to carry away the dead and tend the wounded after the Japanese came. It was rumored that they had been given \$200 apiece by the gentry of southern Shantung to stay.

This procession went silently on and disappeared. Where it came from, nobody knew.

The sun went down behind the hills and a lone crow flew over Dragon Cloud Mountain, on his way home.

A hundred student graduates of the War-time Training School gathered in a tower outside the city. The sound of exploding bombs and crashing houses was clearly audible. The buildings in the city ignited by incendiary bombs burst into flames and sent huge leaping fires into the air; half the sky was a flaming red. The Japanese artillery crept closer and a shell went screaming over Dragon Cloud Mountain. Sulphur vapor hung over the ground. Outside the west suburbs, Japanese tanks had broken the first line of defense. The *thrashing* of machine-gun fire pounded thick and fast in the stu-

dents' ears. They elected a member to seek their officer and ask him to give them rifles so that they could go out and fight the enemy.

The leader was grave and slowly said: "You are only students who have not been fully trained. You cannot fight the enemy now. It is time for us to go."

The students went out on the Haichow-Chengchow road. One of them fell to weeping and could not help melodramatically apostrophizing the night air.

There was a hissing sound in the air above their heads. A flare creaked and crushed through the atmosphere, struck the ground, rent the darkness and made a bright and burning spot in the earth. Quickly, in rapid succession, ten, twenty and thirty bombs fell in the golden-colored wheat and exploded with a gush of black smoke.

The students stumbled and fell over one another and lay prostrate in the ditches beside the road. Now they could hear the sound of machine-gun fire following the highway and coming south. Strange and numberless things struck about them in the dark. Small clods of dirt fell on them and they thought they were mortally wounded. One of them fainted. When he regained consciousness, he didn't know whether he was dead or wounded.

Somebody came over and shook him. "Get up quickly; the planes have gone."

The student rose to his feet, the groans of the wounded and dying ringing in his ears. Some of his friends stumbled forward and then lay down to die. Tears of anger and hate came to his eyes.

"Hsuchow, I swear before long I will come back and restore your liberty."

At three o'clock in the morning what was left of the student corps reached a place of safety and turned around to look at Hsuchow. The city was on fire.

Chapter II

The Retreat from Hsuchow

"Retreats of great generals and of armies accustomed to war have always resembled that of a wounded lion, and such is also undoubtedly the best theory."

—VON CLAUSEWITZ

"One can cut off a slice of bread, but not an army."

—TOLSTOY

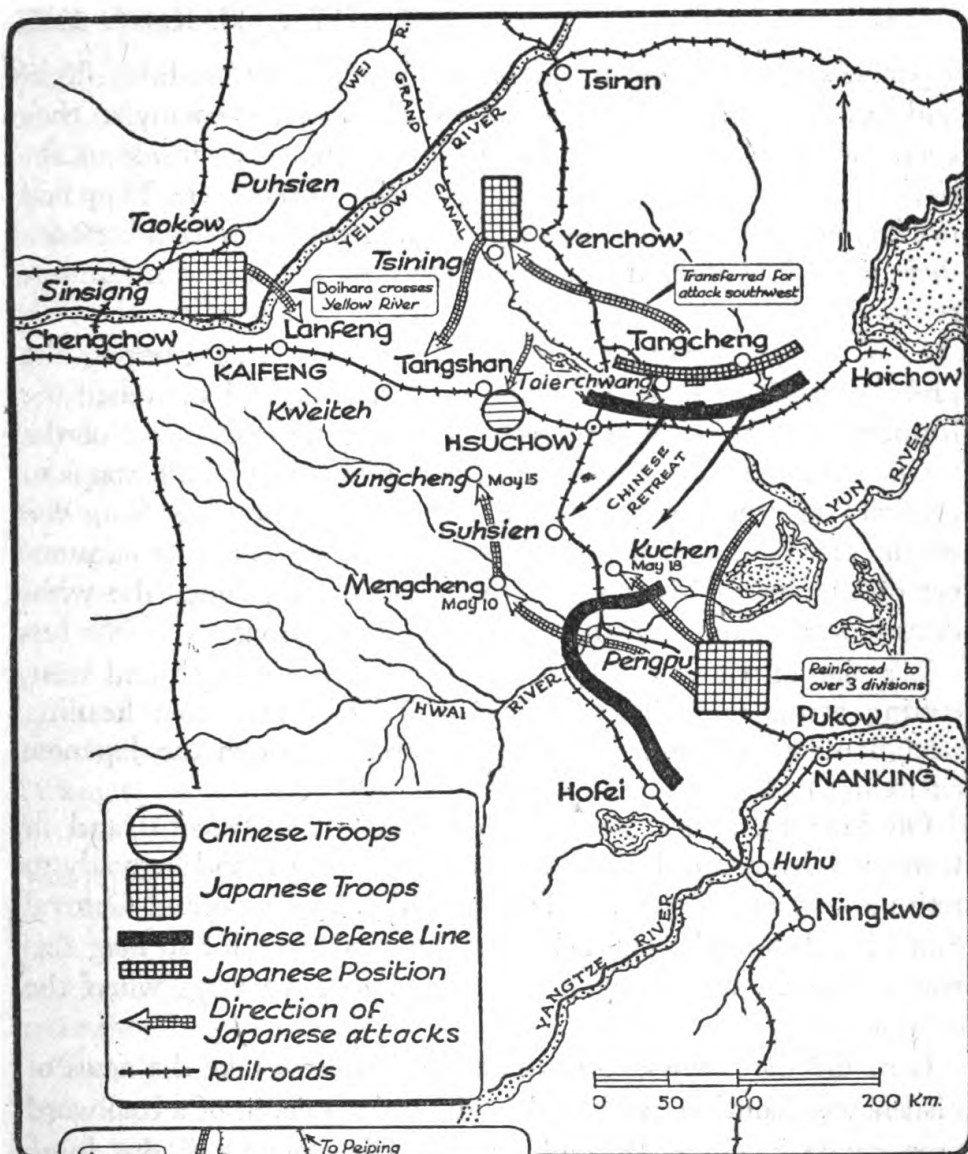
I

THOUSANDS of peasants had been killed by bombings from the air. Towns had been set afire and villages laid waste. The army had been licked and the invaders were swarming in dozens of racing columns upon the abandoned city of Hsuchow.

The Japanese efforts at annihilation seemed about to succeed. Itagaki, Isogai, Terauchi, Doihara and Hata had baited their trap well. The enemy was caged and could not escape. To Peiping and Shanghai came the bulletin: "Three hundred thousand Chinese trapped." The great pincers were closing in on the army.

The army was ragged. It was worn and discouraged. It was completely enervated by three months of incessant struggle. The army was in the dumps, in the depths, in despair. It had received a shock. It had been cheated. It had been unpleasantly surprised by the sudden turn of events. The officers were psychologically upset. At their own lack of foresight they wondered in despair. At the failure to action on their own long-conceived plan of offense they ground their teeth in vain. At the failure of reinforcements to arrive they cried within their bellies and shrugged their shoulders. They knew they were the dupe of circumstances. They knew their leaders were helpless to control fate. They knew they were beaten.

Yet they had to escape. They had to save their own lives. They had to save a great part of the Chinese Army from destruction. But more than all this, when they had run from Hsuchow, when they had escaped the baited traps and when they had broken through the



THE RETREAT FROM HSUCHOW

Japanese lines, they had to turn around, stop their headlong flight and face their pursuers. They had to run from the enemy so they could stop the enemy. They had to break out of the inside of the circle so they could strike against the outside of the circle. They had to run ahead of the Japanese so they could get in position between them and Hankow and stop the advance on the center of Chinese resistance.

Li Tsung-jen's plan was simple. Before May 15, foreseeing the probable necessity of withdrawing his forces, he had shortened the former extension of his line by abandoning the sector east of the Grand Canal. Several days previously, Li had ordered all troops to evacuate Hsuehchow city to avoid unnecessary casualties from the continual aerial bombardment. These two decisions released a number of Chinese divisions and without a doubt facilitated the withdrawal which now took place from the entire front.

Li's plan of retreat called for his forces to move south and west, cutting across the Tientsin-Nanking Railway and then heading straight west in four large groups to break through the Japanese encircling line.

On May 15, orders were dispatched to all army corps and in turn each division to lay out their routes of retreat and be ready to retire at a moment's notice. To General Tang En-po and General Sun Lien-chung who had held their lines inviolate for so long this was a tragedy, and Tang En-po is said to have wept when the order came.

How did the Chinese Government at Hankow take the news of Hsuehchow's doom? It awakened all the natural deceit of a backward propaganda machine. Probably the officials worried all day long, half-dazed over the vague and ominous reports, gathering the news on the telephone, wondering, bothering their heads about what explanations they could make. On May 16, they said they were not pessimistic over the situation and they said the military authorities remained calm. They vehemently denied that Chiang Kai-shek had fled to Chungking and they said the Japanese had failed to establish themselves on the Lunghai Railway.

Among the people of Japanese-occupied Shanghai, the masses, whose sentiment no doubt was lined up in back of Chiang Kai-shek, the 170,000 war victims who were facing starvation showed a curious lack of interest. The 10,000 corpses disposed of in the

month of April, bringing the total cremations for the quarter year to 29,408, remained completely mute on developments.

Magnificent calm was again revealed by the free China military spokesman on May 19 when he announced that Chinese planes heavily bombed Japanese positions around Hsuehchow. He said Chinese forces were advancing southward from the Lunghai Railway. He said that Hsuehchow was "quiet."

He was lying.

Hsuehchow was not quiet; it was dead; it was captured. It had fallen.

News of the victory was received quietly in Japan. The War Office warned the public to be moderate in rejoicing. Enslaved Shanghai was gay. Flags and bunting flew across the streets and up and down the building fronts of Hongkew in blobs of blood red and white. The rising sun waved scarletly in Little Tokyo's victory parade.

Japanese General Tan Takahashi called the cutting of the Lunghai Railway an "act of God." And a Japanese staff officer said: "Chinese troops fight best when they are surrounded." General Shunroku Hata, commander in chief of Japanese forces in central China, declared: "We intend to end the China Incident."

"Undeniably," said the *Japan Times*, "the Japanese people were greatly surprised to learn that when our forces neared the city walls of Hsuehchow, there were but a thousand Chinese soldiers to offer resistance."

They had run away. Like rats leaving a sinking ship they had fled. They had vanished. But they were caught. They were trapped. They were doomed. Three hundred thousand of them.

2

Li Tsung-jen started from Hsuehchow on the seventeenth of May. He had been there trying to stave off the advance of Japanese troops ever since the rout of War Lord Han Fuchu in December, 1937. He had given a lesson to those politicians of the Kuomintang who were jealous of him, and they had repaid him by surrounding him with spies. Now he was saddled with them. He had to rescue them all. He had to save the girls and boys and officials and teachers and publicists and visitors and reporters and soldiers; in fact, the very cream of the Chinese race. He had to save China. Notwithstanding

the expressed optimism of the Chinese Government propagandists at Hankow, notwithstanding their statement that Hsueh was quiet and that Chinese troops were advancing, Li Tsung-jen was now on his way to lead the army in retreat, and at every stage of his journey he reiterated his orders to hurry on the march of the troops swinging from the east to the south and west. His road lay directly south along the Tientsin-Nanking Railway to the vicinity of Suhsien, thence by some not yet fully determined route westward across the railway, across the Fei River and past the Japanese enveloping line to safety. And in almost every town he and his troops passed through, the inhabitants rushed away to the country or barricaded themselves behind bolted doors, quavering half in terror. An unknown wind followed in his wake.

After him the deluge.

Going in the same direction as the advance units of the Eleventh Group of Armies under his own Kwangsi subordinate Liao Lei, he arrived at the small village of Sunchia some twelve miles north of the strategic town of Suhsien late on the night of the seventeenth. He stopped at a house which had been prepared for him and immediately sent out a telegram to General Sun Lien-chung who had been left behind to cover his retreat. The general tenor of this message read:

"I personally shall lead troops under Tang En-po and Liao Lei attempting break through through siege from Yungcheng Mengcheng and Hwaiyuan areas. Request your troops force their way out from Hsiaohsien. Li Tsung-jen."

When the message was sent and he received reports from his subordinates, he ordered that preparations for the departure be made. His staff officers and those of the Eleventh Group of Armies directed the needed measures. Baggage was put in order and food rationed. The troops were brought together at a central point and formed in three columns. The moon pierced through a thin cloud and washed the gathering in a pale light. The stars quietly caught the silent mystery of the night. The order was given: "Get ready." Talking, smoking, lighting a flashlight were forbidden. For fear of losing connections with each other in the dark, everyone was commanded to tie a white handkerchief around his neck. The mystery of the thing lent the night march a peculiar charm. This was especially so for the War Service Corps of sixteen boys and girls who rose quietly and seriously. A boy and a girl made a double

team. They had never experienced anything like this before; it was romantic. At the last moment headquarters gave out the password for the army, a common one and a special one for emergencies. It was whispered that the night march would be fifty li.

Li Tsung-jen came out of his temporary headquarters and stood watching the progress of the collecting forces, the stowing of documents and the fidgeting of the youngsters. A whisper went through the ranks that Li was there and the boys and girls tried to see him; and they no sooner caught sight of him in his long dusty fur-lined overcoat, falling almost to the ground and making him look shorter than ever, than they felt a warm glow of relief and pride. The commander in chief, they thought to themselves, is watching over us; as long as he directs the retreat, nothing can go wrong. A staff officer standing near by called out to comfort them: "Children, don't be sad. If Hsuehchow is completely lost, it doesn't influence the course of the war greatly. If the enemy takes Hsuehchow, then it will become a bomb. In fighting for the final victory we want not only to turn every person into a fighter but every city into a bomb. One day this bomb will explode. And that time will be the end of imperial Japan."

The soldiers sleeping in twos and threes by the road with a blanket between them paid no attention to all this. A night march was old stuff to them. They didn't know anything about Li Tsung-jen and Pai Chung-hsi being there. They probably wouldn't have recognized the commander in chief anyway.

Soon the order came to start. Li Tsung-jen got into a car with Pai Chung-hsi and these two old cronies struck south followed by a cavalcade of nineteen cars and trucks.

The cars traveled without lights. The road was narrow. Two of the trucks overturned. The passengers were quickly shifted to other trucks which became tightly pack-jammed. Nobody sought to repair the trucks; they were left by the wayside. Soldiers roasting rice along the road saw the cavalcade go by and stared in wonder and doubt. Dogs barked.

The sleeping soldiers got up and fell into column. Ahead went the cavalry and infantry, then the adjutants, then the War Service Corps with their happily frightened boys and girls and last of all the artillery, the porters and the baggage. The soldiers marched on in profound silence; only the artillery betrayed itself by the metallic rattle of the gun carriages; the sandy dirt kicked up by the marching feet hissed in gentle reprobation. The stars vanished, leaving the sad,

quiet fields bathed in a weak, pale light cast by the half-moon. A calm peace stole into the hearts of the boys and girls. Who knew what the soldiers thought?

A cock called. The dawn came. The soldiers prepared to rest, splitting up into neighboring villages and leading their horses away to tether under the trees.

The tenderfoot War Service Corps sat down and lanced the blisters on their feet. But they wouldn't rest; they took their work seriously; they went among the people and gave them air-raid propaganda. The girls went into every house, finding a few people who had not gone. There were some women. Good rape bait.

"Haven't you gone, woman!"

"Where should we go? We have no money." The young farmer girl sighed.

By the way the people talked, it was easy to see that other troops had already gone by. There was scarcely any grain left in the houses and the underground private granaries outside. Eggs were not for sale. There was no ripe wheat. Yet an old woman got some radishes, helped the girls make tea and gave them a place to sleep on the rice stalks. It stank badly, but the girls and boys were grateful.

A farmer said: "We are all from one home; we ought to help."

The army slept.

3

The retreat from Hsuechow is one of the strangest operations in military history. The movements of the Chinese and Japanese armies like the movements of the French and Russian Armies described by Tolstoy during the retreat from Moscow, are like nothing so much as a "game of blind-man's-buff, in which two men are blind-folded, and one has a bell to ring, so as to let the other know where he may catch him. At first, he rings it boldly without much fear of his adversary, but as the game gets closer, he tries to steal away noiselessly and generally, when trying to avoid the enemy, blunders into his arms." In the same way, when the Chinese started their retreat, the Japanese knew where to find them; but somewhere along the way they lost track of the adversary and without suspecting his presence came into collision with him now and again. But the strange part of these movements was that while the Chinese Army was flying, the Japanese was not pursuing, though the very object

of its movements was to catch the Chinese. This comes from the peculiar situation that the Japanese were moving to the north while the Chinese were moving to the west directly across their path. Instead of facing each other as two armies do when drawn up in battle array, or facing in the same direction as when one army is fleeing and the other pursuing, these two armies were crossed over each other in most unorthodox fashion. The Japanese moving north from the Hwai River toward the Lunghai Railway were spread out in a great ribbon while the Chinese coming from the east were cutting directly across their lines. Thus the Chinese movement from a mechanical point of view had all the earmarks of a great attack on the Japanese flank. Its character, however, remained that of a retreat, and its entire mood was one of escape.

On leaving Hsuehchow and abandoning the Hanchuang-Taierchwang-Grand Canal line, the Chinese had only one general route: it was south and then west across the Tientsin-Nanking Railway and forward to find the holes in the Japanese blockades. The Japanese knew this: their chief method of finding out the whereabouts of the enemy—reconnaissance planes—was utilized with increasing frequency on the sixteenth and seventeenth of May. Though a drizzling rain fell continuously on the latter date, the Japanese planes flew overhead in an endless queue. Precipitous and secret as the Chinese flight might be, the Japanese could not fail to detect it.

The Chinese tried, therefore, to conceal their plans; they could not mask them with distracting maneuvers for they had not the time to indulge in such persiflage when they were needed urgently on the far side of the Japanese blockade line. Above all, the Chinese tried to hide their actual movements from the enemy. They wished to get in position to launch their attack with suddenness. Once the details of their plan were discovered to the Japanese, they would be doomed. Instead of holding their thin line spread like a net over the whole countryside, the Japanese could then concentrate on the Chinese rear, sever the retreating columns into sections or mass their planes on the exposed troops while they were in vulnerable marching order on the road.

The Chinese casualties had been so heavy that their main force perhaps consisted of 100,000 men. They were divided into three groups. General Sun Lien-chung had the northern column, General Tang En-po the central and General Liao Lei the southern column.

Feeling how important it was to get a start on the vigilant foe,

these forces were ordered to hold themselves ready to march at a moment's notice. At midnight on the seventeenth of May, General Tang En-po called his tired Thirty-second Army down off the banks of the Grand Canal and put it into motion on a southwest route toward Fulichi on the Tientsin-Nanking Railway. It was arranged that the sick and badly wounded should occupy the center, transported on litters on the backs of donkeys, while the lightly wounded tramped along with the rest as best they could. The cavalry went ahead as a screen and the artillery brought up the rear. Seeing in the very size of this army the germs of its own destruction, the staff took elaborate precautions to prevent the numerous elements from losing their way in the unfathomable darkness and unfamiliar countryside. Nevertheless, there was great anxiety lest the force degenerate into a disorganized mob and rush off in disorder.

The distance to be covered was a hundred li. The army had to get off the roads before daybreak. But the nights were short—dark at seven in the evening and light at four in the morning. Still there was nothing to be done but to go ahead.

To give Li Tsung-jen the huge start which he needed to conceal the exact direction of his flight and to prevent the massing of the enemy on his lines of retreat, these thousands of fleeing men had to march thirty-three miles, get off the roads and hide themselves from the enemy between the hours of midnight and daylight at four in the morning—it was obviously impossible. But capricious fortune made the impossible possible. Still on the march at eight o'clock on the morning of the eighteenth of May when the Japanese air armada took off to locate the absconding quarry, the position of the Thirty-second Army of Tang En-po appeared hopeless. But, suddenly, a thick, heavy fog poured out of the earth and drowned the retreating army in a bath of snowy mist. The effervescing waves of clouds burst over the army and wiped it completely from sight. It was alchemy; it was magic; it was fantastic; it was salvation. Along the bottom of this foggy sea, the army of Tang En-po marched, concealed. At ten o'clock the troops halted. Then the mist stole away and it was light and there were planes in the air. But it was too late; the troops were hidden—in the wheat forests, in the hamlets and the hovels. Laughing. Safe.

But by twelve o'clock the planes were out in unprecedented numbers, angrily scouting the land for the vanished foe. Evidently acting

under orders, the hunting planes worked over large areas near the railway, flying extremely low, examining and questioning the countryside until it seemed as if it must yield up its secrets. But again fate intervened. Shortly after noon, a tremendous sand storm broke loose, hiding everything under an impenetrable silica haze. So violent was the storm that the planes no longer dared fly low. Thus all day the troops hid, the soldiers rested well in the fields.

These two acts of nature were the salvation of the army; thanks to the weather conditions on the eighteenth of May the Japanese intelligence failed to learn of the concentration of the Chinese forces north of Fulichi on the Tientsin-Nanking Railway. The three main groups were thus able to draw together and lay plans for their next step—the crossing of the railway. The army had little faith in fate, but such unexpected favors served to heighten the soldiers' courage and lighten the gloom that inevitably hangs over any retreat.

4

The army was to march at least a hundred li a night. But such a schedule was difficult to maintain. The troops were in a strange land, had little idea of the local topography, were well off the main highways and didn't know their way about with any familiarity; besides, it was dark; landmarks did not exist and could not be seen if they did; many of the villages were empty, most of the doors were locked and the villagers were afraid to come out and give directions. Yet the farmers and peasants were the eyes of the army. Without them the soldiers were little better than blind men. But twenty to thirty li from their native villages the peasants were also lost and like the soldiers became blind and didn't know the way. In marching a hundred li at night, the guides had to be changed three or four times. This slowed up the march considerably and lent uncertainty to the whole proceeding.

In classical Chinese military science there is a saying, "moving speedily with a prune in the mouth." That is the way the Chinese Army moved. The very horses seemed to restrain themselves from neighing. They marched alongside the men without making the slightest sound. There was an eeriness about it that impressed all those who took part in the retreat. Everyone remarked on it and it was noted in many chronicles and diaries at the time. Yet this

disciplined silence was troublesome. Many soldiers lost contact with their brothers in the dark and were never heard from again. Whole columns and regiments even became separated from the main stream of the retreat and only escaped by hacking their way out or stealing away in the night through the gaps in the line. Some of the columns, when they believed they had reached their destination, piled up their arms and stretched themselves on the cool earth; others lying down for a few moments of rest, fell asleep, lost the trail and naturally became involved in all kinds of adventures and difficulties, sometimes arriving at points where they had no business to be. Other soldiers loitered behind and fell into the hands of the enemy or took up the profession of banditry and roamed about the countryside. Still others who strayed too far in search of food most often were never heard from again, though several lived to escape and tell miraculous tales. A few of the more wretched soldiers, faint with famine and fatigue, fell down lifeless in the hills. Their number was fortunately few and the retreat was not characterized by excessive physical hardship. The boys and girls of the War Service Corps, however, received their baptism of physical suffering and revealed their need for military training. Unable to keep pace with their assigned units which often made sixty miles a day, they fell behind nursing broken feet. When this happened, they tore off their uniforms and went about with hanging heads begging for food from the farmers.

In their distress and their close association with the soldiers, the young students ceased to set store by those things which they had always held most dear. More than one who had come to Hsuehchow with fierce formal thoughts of patriotism now abandoned them as intolerable burdens too luxurious to be carried among the ranks of the rude soldiers who were discovering that these youths could do something besides lecturing them on the New Life movement and the meaning of imperialism.

Through the retreat the officers displayed their usual calm and serenity. They fared little better than the peasant soldiers and sought to fortify the spirit of their charges by assuring them that their sufferings would be ended as soon as they broke through the besieging line. And they gave the whole operation the character of a spiritual adventure by telling themselves and each other that they were carrying the fate of China on their backs. The soldiers, especially the new ones, ran away in many cases at the sound of artillery

while the old ones occasionally indulged in looting, but the wild confusion, anarchy and mad goddam-the-world-ness of the Shanghai retreat was lacking and the soldiers everywhere revealed the powers of constancy and endurance so characteristic of the Chinese. And far from manifesting coldness toward each other, the officers, soldiers, students and even the stooge officials were knit together by the common bond of suffering.

The troops at first marched at night. Later they marched night and day. In the daytime, avoiding the inquisitive Japanese planes, they sheltered in the wheat forests which the commander of the advance guard often ordered the peasants not to cut down. In many cases they sought shelter in the towns and villages. The smaller the better. Many times the inhabitants in anticipation of their approach had carried off all provisions. It was never certain; every region was an individual case. Villages were burned. People had gone to the mountains. Grain was left in the houses; chickens were gone. By the borders of the Japanese enveloping lines the houses were empty; barley in the fields was sometimes overripe, rotten with waiting. Burnt horses and oxen lay dead under the trees by small pools. The bustling marts were blackened ruins, the small villages deserted, ghostly, burned, torn down.

Every once in a while the bodies of Japanese caught by guerrillas were seen, their hands and feet sticking out of the grass. The girl War Service Corps workers screamed in fright when they saw such sights. Some of the bodies were just bloody trunks. Where the heads had gone perhaps only the killers know. A few ruined tanks lay here and there, scenes of fights between stray units of the retreating Chinese and the advancing Japanese. Bodies lay beside them in pools of blood, their ears cut off, clothes ripped clean away, feet missing, a stomach ripped open and a liver showing.

In the nighttime doors were all locked. The people were gone, or they fled when they heard the noise of approaching soldiery. The people who had not fled said that some soldiers had often been courteous but others had been extremely bad. The seizure of their rooms for living quarters could be borne, but to be conscripted for a porter, to give food without receiving money, to submit their homes to eternal search were things to be abhorred. Always they fled when the soldiers came.

The retreating army on the night of the eighteenth of May resumed its march unmolested under the cover of darkness. But as

the night wore on, the advance guard felt out the presence of a Japanese camp on a hill directly before the main columns. Immediately, an order forbidding conversation or smoking came back along the ribbon of warriors from head to rear. The object of the Chinese being rather to fly than to fight, the army under the conduct of guides took a circuitous route around the hills and raced on for thirty li. Then the soldiers rested. One of them, pillowing his head on an indistinct heap of horse dung, quickly learned his error and suddenly began memorializing his discovery with loud curses. The rupture of the disciplined silence sent an uneasy stir among the exhausted congress of soldiers. The wind sighed softly.

By midnight the army came to a rocky hill, the horses slipping and sliding, some falling down and throwing their riders. Yet the top was attained with surprising speed and quietness. Each man as he passed over the peak observed a fire in the sky to the north. Hsuchow was burning. What thoughts agitated the minds of the fugitives as the red heavens climbed into their vision can easily be imagined. "When we saw the flames," said one of those who escaped later, "we knew Hsuchow was developing the world's worst conduct—killing and burning. Our countrymen were being slaughtered under the Japanese guns. Our houses and crops were turning to ashes under Japanese shells. We swore this eternal shame must be wiped out and our people revenged." Such gloomy presentiments no doubt were not fulfilled in the image of the author. But who can believe that painful sorrow and melancholy fancies were alien to the retreating Chinese?

Such sad speculation again assailed every officer when he came to the Tientsin-Nanking Railway a short time later. As they were going over the tracks, a ghostly hand stole out and restrained infantryman and cavalryman alike and they were stopped by an invisible force. Agitating thoughts crowded in on them as they beheld the gleaming steel rails stretching away in the pale moonlight across the very heart of China. To the south were Nanking and Shanghai; to the north, Hsuchow and Peiping. And now they were all gone and with them the finest railway in all the land. Where now was the transportation for the army? Where now was the unifier of the north and south? And what were they but luckless beaten fugitives abandoning this mighty steel ribbon to the graces of the enemy? And they who had traveled tens of times along these fateful rails—when would they ever again in their lives make the journey? One

cannot doubt that these gloomy reflections weighed down the minds of the retreating troops, and numerous persons are alive to-day to say that this was the saddest part of the whole retreat, but there were those who perhaps, crushed in spirit, nevertheless gave voice to encouraging sentiments. A perhaps too youthful reporter, for example, when crossing the tracks, knelt down and patted the rails, saying: "Be patient, Tsinpu,¹ we shall come back again soon. We shall again hoist our national colors over your tracks!"

5

The little cloth shoes of the soldiers danced silently over the plains, kicking up twistings of brown dust, and they streamed across the tracks and held on their way unmolested during the night. But on the second day when they reached the hills west of the Tientsin-Nanking Railway, they beheld parties of Japanese moving in the distance along the heights while the boom of artillery and the plop-plop of machine-gun fire echoed roundly off the hilly walls. Down into the valley, caged in on four sides by mountains, the army went, discovering along the way the extent of its hunger. Their stomachs which only the day before had been full enough of the food of the peasants in the comparatively undisturbed areas east of the railway (rice, sesamum cakes, stolen chickens, congee and thin soup) were now empty, their exercise-sated bodies, which had been chilled during the infrequent halts at night, gasped in the heat of the day, and their cheeks, alive with sweat, now fed the rushing stream of salt dew which poured forth from their glazed eyes into their parched lips, dry with a hunger that drove many of them to rip the kaoliang stalks from the fields and stuff their mouths with grain seeds. When they discovered stagnant fresh-water pools, they drank, choked with nausea.

In the highlands, soldiers weak with dysentery and relapsing fever fainted and dropped in the green grass of a small valley, and a single Japanese plane flying overhead without apparent mission saw them and unloosed a salvo of hand grenades and dipped low as it dared sweeping the ground with machine-gun fire.

As the army was climbing the hilly steepes which shut in the valley, scouts came back with the intelligence that the enemy was encamped on the other side apparently waiting their approach. This

¹ Chinese name for railway between Tientsin and Nanking.

intelligence was soon confirmed by their own eyes and ears as they topped the hill and heard on all sides of them shells roaring from the guns emplaced on the heights to the southwest and whistling overhead with the speed of an express train, bursting open on the peaks of the Yellow Mountains and covering the hillsides with unfolding flowers and blossomings of white smoke.

The War Service Corps girls jumped from their little donkey carts and ran in haste to the arms of their boy companions where they trembled in alarm. Refugee children, rescued along the way, cried, frightened and bewildered. Soldiers stared, nonplused. The army halted.

The sight was enough to fill many of them with dismay. Even the commander of the Twenty-second Group of Armies, as he looked over his enfeebled squadrons diminished in many cases by more than half during the many months of fighting about Hsuehchow, could not escape a feeling of anxiety. And the students of the War Service Corps, marching with an advanced division, giddy and dizzy by reason of their terrible and unaccustomed exertions in the heat of the day, were agitated beyond common sense.

But the army could not hesitate; for there was no alternative. The Japanese had already swept up the railway behind them. They could not retreat along the way which they had fled from Hsuehchow. They must advance—cut through the enemy or perish.

A division moved up and joined the advance guard. The commander hastily made his dispositions for the fight with an enemy which was really not numerous and which had bumped into the Chinese quite by accident.

Machine guns were placed on the elevated ground at the front. The soldiers were massed in close formation. Baggage was thrown away.

The division commander then addressed a few words of admonition to the young students. Big and huge and rough with an ugly uncouth face which was black with a coarse beard, his tired eyes glowed feverishly as he spoke to them with exaggerated and weighty seriousness.

"In order to lessen our sacrifices and protect the people, we left Hsuehchow. Now it's our duty to get you to a safe place. I want to keep you alive. But you must remember that a retreat is harder than an advance. Be calm. If we meet the enemy ahead, don't become confused or frightened. Then we can get safely to the new line."

Quite different were the words of encouragement a young captain addressed to his soldiers before making the advance. He reminded them of their duty to their country and the race. And he told them to have full confidence in themselves, for their cause was just and they could not possibly be exterminated by the barbarian invaders.

"Brothers, the responsibility of emancipating our race rests with us. Let us avenge with our bayonets the wrongs suffered by our people. Place confidence in yourselves! Muster your courage! With our red-hot blood and strength we'll clear the path for our race. Forward!"

This would have been sure-fire stuff with the students, but the soldiers were only faintly moved; for the danger of their position spoke more forcibly to their hearts than any eloquence; and they went ahead, not with the courage of crusaders but with that of desperate men.

As they started forward, a confused sound reached them, a sort of low rumble. They could not make out what it was at first, but it caused everyone, who was on tenterhooks, to prick up his ears.

As they went on, the uproar became louder and sharper. It was not the hiss of bullets and the whistle of shells that gave it a peculiar nature, but what was creating all the noise was the shouts of the crowds up ahead: "They're here! The enemy has come! Climb the hill!"

These cries rose above all other noises. A sudden voice of alarm was taken up and violently shouted by hundreds of mouths. Then the scared voices gave way before the sound of rushing feet, and there was a great mass of figures streaming back along the paths. From their midst came the sharp authoritative cry again.

"Climb the hill."

On the left was a precipitous hill which was soon swarming with flying soldiers—a countless mob of men, scrambling and clawing their way up the slippery, steep slopes, with bullets hissing over their heads and snapping at their heels. Many fell wounded. But a goodly number reached the top. Hundreds of them were crowded together there in confusion and fear with their breasts heaving from the violence of their exertions.

"Oh, daddy, what a climb!" panted a soldier.

"Good heavens! I think they meant to kill me."

The shouts and laughs of some of the soldiers were in strange

contrast to the tense, scared faces of others. The faces of the students most of all.

"I tell you they're coming up the hill," cried a soldier in a raised voice.

"They're after us, lads."

"Come on! Let's go down."

"That's it. Go down the other side."

"Back! Get back!" a stentorian voice called. The regiment commander was shouting.

"It's forbidden to go down the hill."

The clamor died down soon enough and the soldiers grew quieter.

Again, the regiment commander shouted: "Those with guns save your bullets. Don't fire wildly."

But the Japanese did not follow up the blow. They made no attempt to come up the hill after the Chinese. Probably the unexpected meeting with the enemy had unnerved them too; and they were not anxious for bodily contact.

Finally, the Chinese went down the hill, silently, in little groups of four and five.

In the end, the hilltop was bare save for eleven (five had been lost in the confusion) members of the War Service Corps of the Twenty-second Group of Armies. The students, not belonging to any particular regiment, had been ignored by everyone during the confusion. And they had been too frightened to move by themselves.

Not until dusk did they get up courage to go down the hill. Blood was dripping from the jackets of two of them where they had been hit by stray bullets; and they were really frightened.

Wearily, the students went toward the small village sheltering under the brow of the hill. Like a dog on the battlefield who fearfully approaches a dead soldier whom he is contemplating eating, not being sure that the seemingly quiet man won't get up and strike him, the students went forward in jerks, gingerly drawing back every now and then to sniff the air and look out for the enemy. Was he there or wasn't he? The village, was it or was it not in the hands of the enemy? There was no way of knowing.

"What's that?" said one of them suddenly.

The gate in the village wall was half ajar. A few figures could be seen at the open crack. As they went closer, they made out several aged farmers peering stealthily around the gate corner. Great alarm was boldly scrawled on their faces. They uttered not a word. Like

frozen statues their arms were held aloft in a horizontal position, with their hands pointing to the southwest.

Silently, the students received the signal: no enemy on the southwest. That's the way they fled.

A strange but sympathetic cavalry commander found them, picked them up and carried them away in swift flight across the country, through the wheat, over streams and past thin forests.

On three different occasions during their flight, village elders came out of the walled towns, bowing in welcome and bearing in their hands Japanese flags.

Yes, they had been mistaken for enemy cavalry.

Whenever they saw such things, the young officers and soldiers and students boiled with anger, not at the people but at—well, one of them wrote it:

"Our work among the people is too inadequate. . . . There are so many traitors . . . but they are driven to hunger and they are so ignorant. Unless the fundamental problem of the people's livelihood is solved, such things are unavoidable."

Yet these youngsters and these young officers with some education fell not into cynical despair but girded up their loins for further battle. And when they had reached safety and when they had broken through, a young lieutenant lined them up and addressed them thus:

"Without the loss of a single man we have all escaped from the cordon of the enemy and the traitors. We retreated for the sake of expediency. But from now on we shall see our own flag. We shall ceaselessly harass the enemy, bravely attack him, destroy him and avenge the wrongs suffered by our people."

Meanwhile the main Chinese Army marched on without serious mishap and on the fourth day reached the Fei River.

6

When the Chinese left Hsuehchow, the Fei River was to them the destined and the promised land. Here lay fate.

At this stream so renowned in Chinese history, the Japanese had set their nets to catch the Chinese Army. "Blockade Line No. 1" the Chinese called it. A few hours' march distant, at the Kwo River, lay Blockade Line No. 2.

The Fei River was the point at which all the Chinese maneuvers

on the road of retreat had been aimed. Any previous encounters with the enemy had been mere accidents of fortune, and the Chinese paths of escape, mapped out with the river in mind, were intended to bring the army there in the greatest possible strength, at the most likely time and place, when the Japanese were in weakest numbers. The army, of course, did not hope to find the chance of gaining their second wind for the dive across the waters, but the thought that once they broke through at the rivers, their escape would be an accomplished fact—the thought that here their destiny would once and for all be settled—sustained officer and soldier alike on the march and lent wings to feet which otherwise might have lagged behind.

Legend marks the River Fei as one of the most brightly colored names on the unending scroll of Chinese history. Once before to the banks of this slender stream had China marched forth to meet her fate. Then, a millennium and a half before Li Tsung-jen's escape, had Chinese warriors, making a last stand upon the banks of the Fei River, become locked, according to legend, in bitter struggle with 2,000,000 barbarians for supremacy of the medieval world.

In the fourth century A.D. when the vitality of the race was at a low ebb, when Confucianism was an ossified system of pedantry useful for oppression, when Taoism was degenerating into nihilistic despair, when Buddhism had set her cloying hand upon the native genius of the Chinese race and when eight princes of the blood of the House of Tsin were engaged in a bloody melee of civil war—then from the western highlands had sprung the barbarians, invasive, rampant. To them soon fell the whole of northern Cathay, drowned in a river of savagery.

By 383 A.D., 2,000,000 of these barbarians swarmed over Hsuehchow, rushed south and threw themselves on the Chinese, intent with their rude hands to strangle the race before it could take roots in the south. Like the Holy Roman Empire before it, ravished Cathay tottered on the brink of destruction and hung on the lip of the ash can of history. The Chinese, however, fortified with the strength of desperation, assembled their hosts, concentrated their strength on the shores of the River Fei and went to meet the invaders. For days one of the acutest and most important battles in world history raged while the fate and future direction of Chinese civilization hung in the balance. The Chinese won. The race was saved from barbarization.

Now under the silken-thread rains in the spring of 1938, exactly

1,656 years after the Battle of the Fei, the Chinese were once more hurrying down the colored corridors of destiny.

Perhaps not unlike their ancestors over whose graves they trod, the legions of Li Tsung-jen were not advancing forward with fixed and determined glares, girded for the last desperate battle of civilization when culture stands face to face with savagery and knows its hour, but were fleeing to the rear, seeking not to meet the enemy and crush him once for all to earth but to brush him aside and escape.

Yet, as they fled, wandering amid the memorials of the past and the glorious scenes of their forbears' martial triumphs, the men of Hsueh found of that ancient mighty battle where the whole known civilized world of Asia stood at the crossroads—not a sign. It was all a mystery and the marks of Chinese triumphs had passed away. Where now was all the glory?

The fragrant wind of memory, however, does not seem to have stirred the thoughts of the retreating Chinese, who left not a single line respecting the glorious past immured in the fields over which they were now flying; and though all mentioned in some detail the crossing of the rivers, not one seems to have seen the significant similarity between past and present.

It is well to realize what high thoughts agitated the minds of the Chinese soldiers as they marched across Anhui; for no doubt the historians will find that they were activated by the loftiest moral principles and that their strength was increased tenfold upon thinking of the courage of their noble ancestors. But as the fellow says, "it's all a lot of crap." The Chinese immersed in the perils of the present had little time to bestow on the glories of the past. They had but one thought—escape.

And so to the Fei River, on the twenty-first of May, came Li Tsung-jen and his legions tempting fate. In their rude hands—the nation of China, fragile.

7

By the greatest good fortune, due to the overweening impetuosity of the Japanese, who with true von Moltke intentness were rushing madly northward toward the "objective," the Chinese Army found that the major part of the enemy's force had already sped on in crazy haste to the north, leaving the fords and the river crossings guarded by troops, beautifully supplied with tanks and armored cars

but woefully inferior in numbers. By their western energy the Japanese were to pay dearly. Had they but waited, instead of rushing on to close the pincers, which they were so fond of publicizing, the Chinese would have fallen into their hands, bag and baggage. In the words of Lae Tze, "by doing nothing they would have accomplished everything." But they were so determined to hurl themselves forward and seize the enemy and, of course, the "line of communications" that they never, until too late, observed that the little fellow whom they sought was walking nonchalantly right beside them. The hunter was too hasty and the mad dog lost the fox.

When the Chinese discovered that the whirlwind advance of the Japanese had left great gaps in their rear, they, for once, acted immediately on their information.

Li split the Seventh, Thirty-first, Forty-eighth, Seventy-first, and Fourth Army Corps into three routes and, in order to protect the flank of his main force as it crossed over the rivers, dispatched two divisions to retake several strong points on the highway between Mengcheng and Yungcheng. In three hours the highway was cleared and the Japanese infantry, taken by surprise, drew back into Mengcheng. The Japanese transport, not informed of the retreat, came on and ran into an ambush. Carloads of clothes, rifles, documents and flags, almost all of which they later abandoned on the retreat, fell into the hands of the advance guard. And the soldiers, going through the pockets of the dead enemy and finding fountain pens, handkerchiefs, toothbrushes and toothpaste—all things which they never owned before but only wistfully hoped for—helped themselves. When it was done, the commander sat down and said to his cohorts: "We have completed our duty and cut the enemy in half. Now we only have to hang on until we are dead." Then he gave an order to the people not to cut the wheat, for the army behind him could use it to hide from the planes. Then he camped on the enemy's line of communication and telephoned Li Tsung-jen to go ahead.

Early in the morning Li Tsung-jen, with four divisions of foot soldiers and a regiment of antitank guns, came out on the north shore of the river and stood watching the progress of his army pouring in a choked stream across the rude, narrow bridge of doors, wood planks, stones and mortar which his engineers had hastily thrown together. Flowing back from the river was nothing to be seen but an endless line of vehicles and an enormous body of troops with their baggage and horses and a strange crew of newspapermen,

boy and girl actresses, officials and whatnot stretching away until it was out of sight: this was the Kwangsi contingent which was breaking through the center while the flanks held off the foe. When this army saw the narrow green ribbons of water, they immediately set up a market of noise.

"That's the Fei River," said a soldier.

"Don't look very broad."

"And not so deep either," said a third.

"How rotten we haven't yet crossed! It's getting light," said a young staff officer who, having become estranged from his own units during the night march, had joined up quite accidentally and nonchalantly with Li's main force.

While this motley crew buzzed about the homemade structure, waiting their turn to cross it, eight li up-river by two well-built bridges, the Japanese, with a complement of tanks and armored cars, were camped, waiting for the Chinese to put in an appearance. And fifteen li beyond this lurked another Japanese unit silently awaiting the approach of a quarry which, all unknown to them, was at this very moment a few miles down-river, stealing away.

But the theft of the river ford did not make the Chinese happy. They were nervous about it. Outside the camp in a wide semicircle they stationed soldiers on outposts, peering through the binoculars of their officers into the surrounding countryside for any possible enemy. Inside the circle, not far from the crossing which was a mass of angry, peevish and growling soldiery, two high officers, seated in a grove of trees upon a pile of rice stalks, were diligently scanning a map, which had been laid out before them by an orderly and carefully weighted down with stones. Near by stood a regiment commander with an air of respectful attention, taking in all that was said and every now and then lifting his head in some peculiar manner as if he were listening for something. Suddenly, he nodded, as if he were confirming some secret thought. In a moment two planes appeared.

Li Tsung-jen and Pai Chung-hsi immediately took refuge in a small hamlet and the soldiers scattered, hastening to get away from the fearful bridge.

When the planes had gone, the staff held a hurried council. Had they or had they not been seen? It would not do to take a chance. At the worst the planes had spied them and gone to call the nearest enemy force. The Japanese would certainly attack and the Chinese

would be at a disadvantage if they were caught in marching order on the road. So they ordered every unit, when it reached the opposite bank, to deploy into the surrounding villages and wait the expected enemy attack. They were not to march on. Success seemed more sure this way.

When all but two regiments had crossed, the Japanese infantry, supported by fifty horses and seventeen tanks launched their attack. Though entirely inferior in numbers, they were heavily armed and came boldly forward. But they soon had enough and fell back with severe losses. Thirty grain carts, ten prisoners and fifty porters fell into the hands of the Chinese. All of the porters were Chinese farmers between the ages of fifty and sixty.

They came crying their tale of capture. Though everyone else had gone to join the Red Spears, they had remained behind, for they were old. But it made no difference and they had been seized to carry the burdens of the Japanese.

They said a flock of women, both Japanese and Chinese, was with the army, dressed in uniforms and with hair cut short like men. So to make their force look greater than it was, the Japanese often paraded them about ostentatiously. Also to fool the Chinese troops, they ran up and down the lines shouting in loud voices as if there were hosts of fighters present. Of course, there were, in reality, no large forces, for the main Japanese concentrations had gone on to the north, depositing, along the way, garrisons heavy in arms and mechanization but slight in numbers.

The army had crossed. The groves became thronged as each detachment picked out the best vacant place and rested, whether in some small hamlet or under mulberry trees or in the wheat which was thin and low in this sector. The *mafoos* took the horses to the stream and let them drink, but there was little to eat for man or animal. The soldiers lay with a quiet pain in their hearts beneath the mulberry trees, now and then shaking them and eating the berries.

The people came shyly to look at Li's army, which was a gentle thing in contrast to the monster that had struck them the day before. And though there was no rice, no flour, no tea, and no eggs, they managed to find some chickens and a great soup was started on the river bank. The girls of the War Service Corps walked back and forth to the river, drawing water and lighting fires for cooking. Some broke the blisters on their feet. Others slept, smoked.

A young student wrote in his diary: "How gold the fields are! and how thick the green trees in the distance! But yesterday they were in the hands of the enemy and tomorrow they will again belong to him. How futile! All of us are covered with blood and shame. We cannot retreat forever."

The troops rested until late afternoon. When it was dark, the order for retreat was given once again.

In the night the rain came down fine as hair. It was very black. Front and rear lost contact. There was no sound save the plopping of feet and the panting of marching men. At the rear, the baggage clinked; at the front, the hooves of the horses clop-clopped. In the center went a War Service Corps—a girl and a boy walking side by side, holding hands so as not to get lost.

For many miles not a word was spoken. Everyone was thinking about the enemy in front. What to do if tanks were met? The boys and girls had a policy of their own:

1. No one was to run wildly.
2. Every boy was to protect a girl.
3. Wounded must be put ahead.

Young as they were, they were scared witless at the thought of being captured. Their ideas about heroism and peril were Victorian and melodramatic.

A girl said: "We haven't a bullet for the last emergency."

As she spoke, she touched her stomach with a significant gesture, looking all the while at one of the boys. She seemed to be begging something from him with her eyes. He had a small pistol and it was that which had attracted her glance.

"At least three of us can die together," the boy said.

"And who is the other bullet for?" somebody asked.

"Well, you have to figure one enemy in the account."

Everybody laughed. But the sound of their merriment was soon stilled by the weighty da-da-da of machine guns. The students grew tense and serious. In the dark, the boy with the pistol passed his hand back and forth over the weapon. The girl went very close to him as if she were afraid he would run away. Suddenly, she stumbled on the road, but the boy reached out an arm and squeezed her to him.

As they drew nearer the river, the rain came down more heavily. Some of the boys took off their coats and put them around the girls' shoulders. One of the girls, whose feet were badly blistered, mounted

a horse, but when she came abreast of a grove of trees, her mount took fright and bolted ahead at breakneck speed in the dark.

"Who?" yelled a stentorian voice out of the black.

"Lunghai Railway!" shouted a student, giving the password.

"All right," said the voice, and a staff officer stepped out of the gloom, laughing. "Come with me."

"Is the enemy attacking from both sides?" said the girl in some excitement.

"Never mind," answered the officer, "we have broken through at the center."

"What about the rear?" persisted the girl.

"Oh, they were pursuing," said the officer carelessly, "but there were not many of them and they have been beaten off."

Ahead was a big lump of shadow—the wall of a fortified city. Inside, on the streets, ruined houses reposed in vague heaps. The exhausted soldiers were cooking near the broken walls. Some were drying their uniforms in front of the fire. Patches of dark yellow, purple and gray sprang out of the smoke.

"Ho . . . ha!" shouted the people on the other side of the walled barriers.

Three bonfires were burning, the flames leaping up in the night and uncovering to sight a wide river. Toward the bank of this stream, the mob poured like a fountain, everyone pushing against everyone else. The wind was stiff, the rain heavy and the ground so slippery that men and horses could not maintain a footing on the slope.

The hubbub increased. Tin cases in the baggage section clanged against each other. Carriers were shouting and cursing. Officers were fighting their way through at the head of their own forces. A horse screamed and all the animals joined in a frightful chorus.

"No horse may stop on the bridge," shouted a staff officer, his loud voice cutting through the uproar. "The second platoon of the Special Service Regiment goes first."

"Follow the armored cars, didn't you hear?"

"How about us?" asked the signal corps.

"Follow them. Radio station—be careful, there."

"The adjutants must remain here."

"Say, is that your foot . . . ?"

"Well, your mother . . ."

"Don't push."

"All luggage must stop."

"Someone is walking across the river."

"Hush. Listen, I tell you. No. . . . There! Look!"

There was the splashing sound of water, and then on the dark river suddenly appeared bright blobs of yellow, like the petals of so many golden flowers, coming onto the water, one by one, and floating away.

These were the torches made from the bonfires and carried by the soldiers to light their way across the river.

"The water is too deep," shouted a voice. "You can't cross."

"Come back! Don't you want to live? What's your hurry?" called a staff officer.

The river was really too deep in that spot, and the soldiers finally returned to the shore. By this time, the rain was falling thick and heavy; the branches of the trees were dancing in the wind and bending caressingly over the waters. The rain hissed down into the stream, while the gun carriages rumbled over the pontoon bridge with a roaring sound, and the horses struggled and screamed.

"Riders, come this way!" shouted the staff officer, piloting his horse through the crowd to the river bank. "Now, let's go!" he cried, and with a shove of his body and a light tap of his whip he urged his mount into the stream. The rest of the horses followed, leaping from shallow spot to shallow spot. The soldiers immediately came in after them, and that section of the river was soon filled with men.

At last, they reached the opposite side, both horses and men sneezing, everyone breathing heavily, their faces shining with rain water. In the distance, the luggage carriers closely pressed across the pontoons. The bonfires on the opposite side went out one by one.

The army had crossed.

On May 21, the following message reached Chiang Kai-shek's headquarters at Hankow:

"The main forces of the Fifth War Area have reached their designated positions. Li Tsung-jen."

The army of Hsuchow had been saved.

Those who inevitably believe that the important events of history are irrevocably tied to the apron strings of conventional drama must, no doubt, when they read this account of the retreat of the Chinese

Army from Hsuchow, feel a sense of disappointment and frustration. For here are 300,000 men fleeing across the most historic fields in Cathay, carrying with them the fate of the Chinese race, many of them sensible to the drama in which they are the principal actors, all of them moved by mingled emotions of sacrifice, patriotism, fear and the desire to escape, and all of them mindful that their flight is building up to one grand, crashing climax at the Fei and Kuo Rivers where they must break through the Japanese lines or perish—and then nothing happens. What a letdown!

No doubt, some future writer, making an epic tale of this retreat, can weave the crossing of the Fei River into a saga of faith, courage and excitement, and, no doubt, even we, with a few skillful changes in mood, a few shufflings of time and place, of paragraph and sentence, of event and deed, arranging them in closer juxtaposition with each other, might, without falsifying fact in any way, mold a tale of patriotic and national derring-do that would excite the interest of the reader to the last drop of blood; but then we would be arranging fact to make untruth, we would be succumbing to the cheap newspaper convention of the "inside story" when there is none, and we would be creating a demi-world of make-believe, all of which we cannot do; for no matter in what glowing terms we paint the Hsuchow retreat in order to please readers, we cannot get away from the testimony of pusillanimous reality.

However, while the breaking of the blockade lines by Li Tsung-jen's main army may have, in the eyes of honest sophistication, been unattended by extreme perils and unembellished by dramatic incidents, nevertheless, the retreat from Hsuchow, as attested by numerous hairbreadth escapes and thrilling individual adventures was, for a great many people, not without its dangers. A soldier tells us how he fell asleep and woke up to find the army gone; another relates how his company was scattered in the night by tanks and how he crawled through the wheat forests for days on end; a clerk and several reporters have left us accounts of how, their passage across the Tientsin-Nanking Railway being blocked, they made their way down the east coast of China in disguise until they reached Shanghai, a city in the hands of the Japanese; we hear that the Szechuan armies, left to the last, were, in order to escape, forced to make a series of distracting maneuvers over the whole Kiangsu countryside; and we know that General Fan Sung-fu led the Forty-ninth, Twenty-eighth and Ninety-second Divisions for two months

through occupied areas before he could get his forces back to Hankow; and we see and hear these things and know that a great many men underwent a great many perils; but the thing that strikes us most of all in reading contemporary accounts and in listening to the tales of soldiers and commanders is that in every case there is always a way out, always a way to escape the enemy. Time and time again, a Chinese force meets a Japanese force and, instead of being annihilated, cuts around the enemy, cuts through him or marches nonchalantly forward, even when losing the way, somehow contriving to escape.

To what are we to attribute this? Unless we say that fortune or providence was on the Chinese side, or believe, as some missionaries undoubtedly did, that Madame Chiang Kai-shek's Methodism had something to do with it, we are forced to conclude that either the Japanese were incredibly stupid and the Chinese incredibly intelligent or that simply—as Tolstoy says—a retreat cannot be cut off.

We may be sure that all the Chinese and their sympathetic, soul-debauched or paid foreign chorus publicly, if not privately, subscribed to the former view. And this view was strengthened in their own eyes by the fact that the Japanese spokesman, far from the scene of action, had publicly proclaimed that the Chinese had been “cut off.” Because of such statements, contemporary commentators, who even years after the event could not tell you how the retreat from Hsuehchow took place or what forces were concerned in it, found great delight in ridiculing the Japanese operations. We, however, who are not concerned with sticking labels on events but only with seeking to understand them, must cast aside this superficial view and go to the facts themselves.

And from whatever angle we approach the final moves of the Hsuehchow campaign, we are forced to the conclusion that in the month of May, 1938, the Japanese reached the summit of their military glory, revealing a sense of timing, coordination, organization, daring and imagination beyond anything shown in the China invasion. It only remains for us to place events in chronological order to see the skill with which the Japanese moves were executed.

For what is the state of things as we first see them in the final Japanese attempt to take Hsuehchow? The Japanese and Chinese Armies are deadlocked; the Japanese armies cannot unite; they are striving to combine by moving up from the Hwai River on the south and moving down from the Grand Canal on the north of

Hsüchow so they can effect a junction, capture the city and consolidate the Tientsin-Nanking Railway. In their final and successful drive, their first move is one of retreat. The independent regiment of the Fourteenth Division withdraws from Lincheng, the Seventh Division closes in on Tsining, and the Sixteenth Division, closely followed by the Tenth Division, abandons its position on the Taierchwang line and moves to the north also to the vicinity of Tsining on the Grand Canal. Proper air reconnaissance might give the Chinese commander, Li Tsung-jen, timely warning of the Japanese plans to encircle the lakes and his left flank, in which case he might break through the holding forces of the Japanese on the Taierchwang line and attack the invaders from east of Tsining. But increased pressure from the Hwai River region makes imperative a complete withdrawal from the east side of the Tientsin-Nanking Railway; for in coordination with their movement from the north the Japanese forces begin to push from the south across the Hwai River in two columns. On May 9, the stage is set. The Japanese on the south break into and capture Mengcheng. Simultaneously, on the north the combined Seventh and Sixteenth Divisions with the regiment of the Fourteenth Division strike south from Tsining, and the Tenth Division forces a crossing of Lake Weishan. How then can it for a moment be supposed that the coordination in time and space of so many diverse forces and innumerable columns (we have mentioned only a few) was the result of stupid blundering upon the part of wooden-headed Japanese staff officers? These detailed movements, if nothing else, reveal a carefully contrived plan, executed, at least in its results, with well-oiled efficiency.

These moves, as long as the Chinese maintained their passive attitude of cordon defense, practically cooked the goose of Hsüchow and made a retreat imperative.

At a council of war held in Hsüchow, a staff officer gave it as his opinion that they should retreat as fast as possible unless—he added with typical Chinese delicacy—reinforcements were on the way. At the same time, while all the officers felt the need for immediate retreat, a certain fear of governmental censure combined with a certain forlorn hope made it imperative that some event should appear that made a retreat obvious and immediately necessary.

This event, of course, was soon forthcoming. It was the cutting of the railway bridge at Hwangkow. Now everyone could say: "Our communications are cut; we must retreat."

The idea of cutting off Li Tsung-jen's retreat, that is, of annihilating 300,000 fleeing men, is, from an objective standpoint, quite ludicrous; for these men were moving under a preconceived plan along definite routes of retreat which were, except in their general details, quite unknowable to the Japanese. However, even if the Japanese knew in advance just where the Chinese would make their attempts to break through, it is hard to see just how they would have stopped the Chinese from getting through them or around them. They might have dispersed the Chinese forces; they might have rounded up stragglers and annihilated a few men in battle; but they would have found it impossible to cut off 300,000 men. There is always some way of getting around, and the whole Hsuehchow retreat is but a classic illustration of this truism. If there isn't a fog, there is the high wheat or country bypaths, and if none of these exists, there is always darkness.

We are not writing a formal history of the Sino-Japanese War, and we have neither the facts nor the inclination to make a detailed military study of the retreat from Hsuehchow, but we should be doing the reader and those historians who perhaps may come after us a disservice if we allowed them to labor under any kind of misapprehension as to the seriousness of the position of the Chinese Army as it began its retreat, and we should be furnishing a base for all kinds of chauvinistic rejoicing and cheap glorification at the expense of reality and at the expense of the dirty but true glory of the peasant soldier.

The conditions are simply these:

1. The Japanese cut Li's line of communications.
2. They cut him off from his armament supply and from reinforcements.
3. They cut him off from the base of resistance at Hankow.
4. They had erected a barrier across his line of retreat.
5. This barrier was nothing but a thin line of soldiers, without depth. It was not facing toward the enemy, but at right angles to him. Therefore, the Japanese in relation to the retreating Chinese, had no position in depth. They had no lines of supply, no reserves, extending to what in a normal position would have been their rear in the west.

We may say that the Chinese Army was "cut off." In the popular sense of the word, we may say it was "trapped." But the words "cut off" when used in a military sense convey to the average person a

meaning of extreme peril. Undoubtedly, a small force, surrounded in a tiny pocket and cut off from all supplies, stands a fair chance of being wiped out, though even this is debatable, judging from the history of guerrilla operations; however, the large Chinese Army was not forced into a small pocket, but, quite on the contrary, had hundreds of miles within which to maneuver through the Japanese lines, which were entirely too extended to be effective against a foe determined not to surrender. And there you have the significance of the retreat from Hsuehchow.

The very word "surrender" implies an act of will upon the part of those surrendering. Prisoners are not taken in large numbers unless they mean to be. The Chinese thought there was much more to be gained by fleeing than surrendering, for, quite apart from their pardonable and questionable patriotism and from the pressure of public opinion and all their upbringing, training and environment, both soldier and officer knew by the experience of thousands of others that they could expect little more than a life of slavery, torture or death from their captors.

No doubt, if the commanders in chief, Li Tsung-jen and Pai Chung-hsi, had completely faked the job as General Tang Sheng-chih did at Nanking, if they had suffered softening of the brain and heart as Ludendorff did in 1918, if they had given up as Leopold and the French did in 1940, or if their subordinates—Sun Lien-chung, Tang En-po, Yu Hsueh-chung, Chang Tze-chung and others—had disobeyed orders, had failed to sacrifice themselves for the safety of the whole army, had become distrustful or lost heart and surrendered as many a European commander might have done in just such a position in the west—then the Army might have been overwhelmed, the Chiang Kai-shek government might have been destroyed and everyone would have said: "The retreat was cut off." Yet this does not prove the possibility of cutting off the retreat but only goes to show the importance of will in battle and war.

If it were true that the Japanese staff intended—and they may have intended—to cut off the retreat of the Chinese Army and capture it as one man, so that their purpose was foiled by the perfidious Chinese, it is obvious that the Chinese writers, in a certain sense, were quite right in speaking, as they did, of the conclusion of the battle of Hsuehchow as the "Victorious Retreat," the "Triumphal March" and whatnot. However, to jump from this rationalization to the conclusion that the retreat from Hsuehchow was a series of vic-

tories for the Chinese and defeats for the Japanese is a sophism that we, who call things by their right names, cannot indulge in.

For leaving aside the national mythology, such an inference contains a self-evident contradiction which was no doubt apparent to the Chinese myth-makers but was quite ignored by their foreign chorus: these "victories" within two weeks of their achievement almost led to the utter destruction of the Chinese Government and the downfall of the free Chinese Republic; the Japanese "defeats" culminated not only in the capture of Hsuehchow, which in itself would have meant very little, outside the moral effect on both sides, if the Chinese had maintained their strong position on the Tientsin-Nanking Railway, but also led to the control of the eastern half of the Lung-hai Railway and brought a definitive victory and conquest of China as near as it ever was to Japanese grasp. The fallacy lies in the fact that the "observers," far from the scene of action, were not aware of the terrific military crisis which faced the nation of China immediately after the conclusion of the retreat from Hsuehchow.

The Chinese Army carried out their retirement in good order, but they continued backward for so long and so far that it is difficult not to detect suggestions of flight in what they then chose to call a "withdrawal." It would seem that a "withdrawal" of 110 to 140 miles might have suggested a few determined stands along the way, but such was not the case. And yet the writers who escaped from Hsuehchow and immediately returned to Hankow, instead of staying on the front to see the playing out of the most significant period in the Chinese War, tell us that the retreat was a victory for the clever Chinese who again put one over on the stupid Japanese. Why do they not rather tell us that the Chinese Army was in the most dire straits, that the soldiers were undergoing the most intense physical sufferings, that the officers were twisted by psychological maladies and that both soldier and officer (I do not exclude the officer) were in need of all the help and encouragement they could get from the rear? An army spokesman in Hankow said that the Hsuehchow battle was not a decisive one. Why did he not admit the decisive nature of the battle and call on the nation to rally to the army's aid? Why did a Chinese official say: "If Japanese militarists do not change their attitude, Chinese aircraft may be compelled to bomb military bases in Japan"? Why did he not rather tell the Chinese soldier how it was that not one Chinese plane was seen over the front during this period? It was no fault of the soldier that the officials, comfortably

ensconced in their dugouts in Hankow, chose to amuse themselves with frightful daydreams and atrocious lies that would have choked the soldier with anger could he have heard them and that ought to have choked any person with human feeling (even a propagandist).

The strange discrepancies between the events as they happened and official statements is a thing to be wondered at only by innocent children, but when reporters, the forerunners of historians, especially neutral foreign reporters—journalistic, missionary, military and diplomatic—substitute the sayings of certain leaders and official spokesmen for a prosaic recital of the facts, any such thing as reality disappears under a heap of demagogic hash and mystical official crap. For several years there were many writers of books, big-name contributors to magazines, well-known foreign correspondents, retired admirals, lecturing missionary doctors and Y.M.C.A. secretaries who rationalized Chinese defeats by calling them “victories,” and all they thought about was making money, making a name for themselves, joining a lobby for some political end or getting a standing as a “friend of China” or keeping their influence vis-à-vis Chinese officialdom. And how much worse it was at the time of happening, during the most critical period in the history of the Chinese Republic, immediately following the retreat from Hsuechow, to hear this resounding defeat called a “victory”! How horrible it was to see all classes shrinking from the truth when the very urgency of the situation cried aloud for facing facts, when soldiers were spilling forth their blood on the Honan sands, when they were tearing raw corn from the fields to fill their famished bellies, when commanders were crying with impotency, when young officers were being tortured and others were committing suicide and others were being executed and when China came up to the very abyss of ruin!

Perhaps these things are not worthy of our notice, but it is only by going to them that we can bring daylight to bear on the mass of misinformation that with our newspaper reporters parades under the cloak of “objectivity” and with our missionaries and retired admirals comes under the head of honest righteousness.

The retreat from Hsuechow was not a victory, any more than Dunkirk was a victory for the British; but it was an astounding and glorious example of the mass will of the Chinese to resist. And this is good enough for us, who have always been satisfied to call things by what they are, and not like that present brood of American and British government officials, military observers and traveling com-

mercial spies, who, never having seen the Chinese Army in action, publicly proclaim its glories but privately report to their respective employers that the Chinese have never "really" fought the Japanese. If these so-called "war lords," Li Tsung-jen and Pai Chung-hsi, had not led their armies out of Hsuehchow, if they had elected to surrender, the Chinese Government might very well have been forced to surrender, too. In that case, our diplomatic and military reporters in China might not have the opportunity to calumniate the Chinese soldier. They would be too busy in this country defending their own shores.

But still the retreat from Hsuehchow was not a victory. Among other things it resulted in the battle of the Yellow River and the battle of the Yellow River resulted in near ruin.

Chapter III

The Battle of the Yellow River

"In war, the commander of a great mass finds himself in a constant surge of false and true information, of mistakes committed through fear, through negligence, through thoughtlessness, of acts of disobedience to his orders, committed either from mistaken or correct views, from ill will, a true or false sense of duty, indolence or exhaustion, of accidents which no mortal could have foreseen. In short, he is the victim of a hundred thousand impressions, of which the most have an intimidating, the fewest an encouraging tendency.

" . . . whenever an enemy is not in downright earnest about advancing, a river will cause him to stop his movements and thereby afford a lasting protection to the country.

" . . . as it is a natural impulse for a drowning man to seize at a straw, so it is the natural order of the moral world that a people tries the last means of deliverance when it sees itself thrown on the brink of an abyss."

—VON CLAUSEWITZ

I

CHINA owes her freedom from the Japanese to many things: to her massive population; to her size and magnificent back country; to the Kuomintang-Communist United Front; to Pearl Harbor. But at one time she owed it most of all to the Yellow River.

This great, turbulent snake, which today drains the land of 100,000,000 people on its march from Tibet to the sea, over 4,000 years ago cradled the Chinese race and gave birth to a civilization that has since spread from its banks over the whole vast subcontinent of China—north to Siberia, south to Burma, east to the Pacific and

west to Mongolia, Turkestan and Tibet. Though the river nursed and brought into being Chinese civilization, it often threatened to destroy it; for yearly it overflowed its banks, inundating hundreds of villages and ruining millions of acres of crop land so that centuries of peasants gave it the name "China's Sorrow." Yet the Chinese owe life and the very history of their race to this malignant, muddy dragon; for, from the earliest times, the Yellow River was a moat, which nature had dug to protect the immature strength of the race against invading northern barbarians. And the protection that this river and later the Yangtze River afforded gave the Chinese time to take roots in the south and establish a high degree of civilization which Asia might not otherwise have had.

In the spring of 1938, the Yellow River again moved onto the stage of history and opposed itself as a barrier to the new barbarian invaders of China. While Li Tsung-jen was leading his army in retreat from Hsuehchow, the Japanese were looking far beyond that battle for a means of destroying Chinese resistance completely. To do this, they planned to send a new force across the Yellow River, above Lanfeng on the Lunghai Railway, 170 miles west of Hsuehchow, disperse the retreating Chinese and advance on the then-unprotected war-time capital of China at Hankow. They thus hoped to destroy the main Chinese Army, capture the government and knock China out of the war at one blow.

The man chosen to cross the Yellow River and finish off the Republic of China was Lieutenant-General Kenji Doihara, commander of the Fourteenth Japanese Division. A more dramatic instrument of fate could not have been chosen. Of all the fanatic, plotting crew of Nippon militarists, Doihara was the best known, the crudest and the most spectacular. Sworn enemy of the Chinese Republic, he was the most hated man in China. To many Chinese he was the incarnate Devil of Japanese imperialism. Seven years before, he had by intrigue, bribery and terror brought about the downfall of Manchuria, and during those years he had become more than a man; he had become a legend—"Lawrence of Manchuria."

But Doihara was no romantic, ascetic, guerrilla leader. He was a short, squat, ugly, arrogant man, an apostle of action and intrigue; some said brilliant, others said lucky—obviously, well connected in Japan. A rowdy, a roisterer, a Chinese linguist, a friend of pimps, Chinese politicians and the Japanese emperor, he headed a fantastic organization of priests, students, traveling salesmen, whores and

gangsters that acted as an advance guard of the army. Essentially a plotter, used to gaining his victories without fighting, he now found himself ill-placed in command of a division in the field. A determined schemer, bawdily intriguing for the downfall of the Chinese Republic, he was now for almost the first time to be forced into open, unrelenting battle on the plains of Honan Province.

It was the job of Doihara to cross the Yellow River. It was the job of General Shang Chen, commander of the Thirty-second Chinese Army, to stop Doihara from crossing. Shang was everything Doihara was not. Shang was gentle, Doihara rough; Shang was genial and suave, Doihara abrupt and arrogant; Shang spoke one foreign language, English; Doihara spoke Chinese; Shang spent his spare time teaching polo; Doihara never had any leisure except for intrigue. Shang, a northerner, was in bad favor with the southern generals in Chiang Kai-shek's armies; Doihara was a reputed favorite of the Japanese emperor. Shang trained boxing teams for the Olympic games; Doihara fought in the streets.

Late in April, Shang Chen received information from his spies that Doihara was moving west in Honan Province with the apparent intention of crossing into Shantung. Shang immediately changed his troop dispositions and moved General Li Pi-fan and his Twenty-third Division up to the Yellow River. This general placed two regiments on the banks of the river and held one in reserve. Suddenly, on May 9, word came that a raiding Japanese force was approaching Li from the east and on the same side of the Yellow River. Li reported that the force was about a battalion, but Shang thought it might be more and warned Li to keep a strict watch. Li ridiculed the idea that there could be any strong force in the vicinity and neglected to warn his brigade commander. Later it developed that friction existed between Li and his brigade commander.

The Japanese, after marching all night, suddenly appeared in front of one of Li's regiments on the morning of May 10. The garrison was taken completely by surprise and the brigade commander woke up to find the enemy at his gates. Badly cut up, he was soon routed and driven out of the battle altogether.

Instead of resting, the Japanese pushed immediately to the west in motor trucks. They reached Li's second regiment in about two hours, again caught it by surprise and wiped it out after a brief fight.

Planting the rising-sun flag on the south bank of the Yellow River, the Japanese raiding party signaled Doihara that the Chinese river

garrisons had been wiped out and the way was now clear for him to cross. He immediately threw pontoons across the waters, which were very low and quiet at the time, and with 500 trucks and motorized artillery crossed the river and headed south moving fast.

General Li Pi-fan with his remaining regiment fell back into the walled town of Hotseh and blocked all the gates. Surrounding the town, the Japanese within two days smashed through the walls and with the exception of two or three hundred taken prisoner wiped out the entire garrison.

In the end, General Li Pi-fan, left alone with a few of his personal staff, sat in his headquarters, inconsolable and incapable of action. His carelessness had been responsible for one of the greatest disasters of the war. Because of him, Doihara had accomplished the almost impossible feat of crossing the Yellow River in the face of hostile forces.

Li made one last despairing effort and called an old Peiping soldier to his side and ordered him to take a company of men outside the town and attack the rear of the Japanese. But the old soldier came back in a moment and reported that there were only seven men left alive in the company. Li's immediate staff begged him to leave the town at once, but he was no longer capable of positive action. The enormity of his offense seemed to weigh him down and he sat brooding in his chair. Suddenly, he called his orderly and asked for his service revolver.

Pretending not to hear, the orderly turned away, tears in his eyes. Li sprang from his chair with a tremendous bound, pounced upon the orderly, seized the gun, shouted the one word "traitor" and shot himself through the head. Whether the last word he spoke was meant for his orderly or himself no one will ever know. By committing suicide in the best spirit of the Mings, he was probably only anticipating what would have happened to him on the execution ground.

Doihara, now safely across the Yellow River, moved south over the body of his fallen foe toward the Lunghai Railway.

Not knowing that Doihara had crossed the Yellow River, I arrived at this time in the city of Chengchow, intending to go along the Lunghai Railway to the east. The Chinese Army, coming from

the south and west, was pouring through Chengchow in ever-increasing numbers. Every day fresh regiments were passing through, but their presence was not a burden on the town, for they were not allowed to disembark, so urgently were they needed at the front. These troops, coming from widely scattered regions of China, were being concentrated on the Lunghai Railway, some said, to reinforce the Hsuehchow front; but no one, not even the officers, was quite sure just where they were going.

It was the sixteenth of May, and the tracks and sidings of this important junction town were massed with cars and engines, with fresh, whole-bodied soldiers going to the front and exhausted mangled ones coming back. In the depressing light of lanterns hanging by nails from the walls, soldiers could be seen climbing up and down into the big, dim caverns of the freight cars. Some were buying copper candies; others were purchasing cigarettes and breaking them in two pieces and smoking half; still others were openly pissing out the freight-car doors, while most of them were sitting slumped half asleep, inside the cars which were so crammed that there was little possibility of lying at full length on the floor.

At dusk a regiment of the reorganized training brigade, now called the Forty-sixth Division, drew into the station from the south, and I climbed aboard and announced that I was going with them—wherever that might be. Although opposed by a few warrant officers, I was supported by the mass of the soldiers and soon won a place in the car and sat down to contemplate my companions.

Nearly everyone of them was young; their faces glowed with good health and their countenances were frank and open. They were lithe, wiry and strong, but gentle-eyed. Their hands were rough with the marks of field toil and their faces were bronzed by many years in the sun, but neither their faces nor their hands were ingrained with that peculiar black dye that is the sign of battle; and their uniforms, though wrinkled and sloppy and dirty, bore none of those deep stains such as are made by oil or war muck or blood. In fact, most of them had never fought before; they were on the front for the first time.

From this it might be supposed that they were looking forward to the immediate future with a feeling of thrilling anticipation and general excitement, perhaps, not unmixed with fear; but from such a picture several details were lacking. Most of the men were in a bad state of nervous depression; the regiment had come more than 1,500

li from Hunan Province, south of the Yangtze, and had been more or less cooped up in their cars like so many prisoners for more than five days. During this time they had been able to secure only a modicum of sleep and such food as they could manage to beg or buy at the station. The Chinese commissariat or whoever, if anyone, was in charge of such things, had turned a deaf ear to the repeated application sent by the regimental quartermasters for the necessary rice. This rice, which was not only the alimentary but in the last word the spiritual sustenance of the soldier, was nowhere to be had, not because the rice didn't exist but because no prior arrangements had been made to feed the soldiers on the way, and no later arrangements could be made without delaying the soldiers from reaching their appointed destination on the front. Thus this regiment of the Forty-sixth Division—only one of dozens such, for they will never all be known—went into battle without food and without sleep. Such are the exploits of the thugs that seized them from their homes, roped them in a chain gang (I have seen them roped), sent them off to a training camp, told them to "die for our leader"¹ and shipped them to the theatre of action, not fattened, but half-starved for the slaughter.

The soldiers were weary, both physically and mentally, and a spirit of resentment seemed to hang over them. It was not the bitter, angry, tough and Irish-like resentment of old soldiers; rather the bewildered, hurt resentment of children who didn't know exactly what was happening to them, but knew they didn't like it, whatever it was. This brooding spirit was sensed by the officers and they sought to dispel it by various means.

One of these methods was singing. As I sat there, a voice from the next car shouted: "All right, all together, now! One, two, three"; and twenty or thirty voices took up the song, "Hurl your sword at the Devil's head," ending with the words, "Kill! Kill! Kill!"

When these words had been flung out with a simulated savageness, the leader raised his arms over his head, tapped his foot to focus attention and threw down the words of another song with a crash, bursting out with "Arise! Arise!" The voices of the singers rose triumphant over the cacaphony of the railroad yards, and their feet, stomping up and down on the wooden floor of the freight car, added a certain martial tone to the song. It all seemed very stirring.

¹ *Ling Siu*, Leader, a term much fancied by the Kuomintang ruling clique and used on posters, in schools and in training camps to refer to Chiang Kai-shek.

Except for a few mumbles there was not a sound from our car; not a soldier sang.

"Why don't they sing?" I asked a young adjutant who was beside me.

"They don't know the words."

"Well, how is it that those fellows on the next car can sing and these can't?"

"Oh, they're not soldiers, really. They're members of the Political Corps. Most of them are students. They learn the songs."

"Why don't the soldiers learn the songs?"

"Haven't got the time. Anyway, they don't care much for these songs."

"Then why does the Political Corps sing them?"

"To keep up the spirit of the soldiers. Why else?"

A soldier who had been listening to our conversation suddenly interrupted with a question.

"Do American soldiers sing?"

"Yes."

"Do they have to learn the songs?"

"No, they sing when they want to."

"So do we."

"Sing us an American song," called out another soldier.

"I don't know any songs. Besides, I can't sing."

"Sing! Sing! Don't be polite. Sing!" The voices were imperative.

As there was no way out of it, I chanted in singsong fashion some doggerel a Peiping prostitute had taught me:

If there's no rice,
And if there's no money,
And if there's no lovin'—
Then, it's no use.

"Ha! Ha! That's good. Is that the song of an American soldier?"

"No, that's the song of a Peiping whore."

"It's good. 'If there's no rice. . . .'"

"I bet a soldier taught her that song."

"Oh, you can be sure of that."

"Yes, that's us all right. It's really very good. 'If there's no rice.' You get it. We have no rice. 'And if there's no . . .'"

"Say, who invented the story that these people eat rice like we do?"

"As a matter of fact, they do."

"As a matter of fact! Have you had even one little grain of rice since we started?"

"Come to think of it—no. But what's that sticking out of your knapsack there? Is that a bit of fried cruller?"

"Why don't you join the intelligence section—you've got such sharp eyes?"

"Come, give me some!"

"I gave you a cigarette last night, didn't I?"

"And who bought those two eggs this morning? And who paid for the drinking water?"

"A few measly coppers—huh! Well, take your cruller—here! But don't go stuffing yourself. You might get sick from overeating and then you couldn't fight."

"Overeating! Say, ever since we left Hankow, I haven't had enough to keep a cricket from starving."

"Listen to him. Just listen to him. Why the way you've been shitting, your stomach must be full of all the rice in Hunan!"

"I suppose that's from eating, is it? I suppose you haven't done the same. Cold water, that's it. Nothing but cold water—that's all we get at these stations. . . . And the shits."

"The mother of that cold water! What do you expect? You're a soldier now, or didn't you know? You haven't seen through to the whole thing. Wait till you hear those big guns and you'll really shit, and it won't be from the cold water, either."

"Fighting—now, that's my business. Wait till I lay my hands on one of those Japanese dwarfs. I'll eat his liver and kidneys."

"You'll really have a bad stomach then."

"Say, Adjutant, did you find out yet where we're going?"

"To Kweiteh, I think."

"See, I told you. We're going to Hsuchow to save those northerners."

"A fine lot of saving you'll do. Why you'll probably sleep through it all! The only time you ever open your eyes is when the sun gets in them."

"Well, what's wrong with that? Can't sleep at all on this old shake-your-bones."

"I suppose you'd like to go to one of those fine hotels here: that would just suit you, eh?"

"And why not?" said an old soldier from the corner of the car. "It would suit me, I'll tell you that. I'd like a good place to sleep. Something to eat, too. Something good. I'm tired of a pulling stomach. Don't want a pulling stomach. Rips and tears you. Don't like it. This train rips and tears and I don't like it either. And if you think

we'll get some sleep tonight—that's where you don't know a thing. They'll hold up the train and hold it up and the regiment commander himself don't know what time we'll start. You ask them what's wrong and see if you can get a decent answer out of them. And when we start, how far you think we'll go? Like as not, less than 200 li. Like as not, we'll still be on the way in the daytime; and the planes will come and bomb. Sure, I'd like to go to a hotel and sleep and I'd like to sleep in a motorcar like some of our big officers, so they won't get bombed. Oh, you don't know a thing. Wait till . . ."

"Cho ni ko pi wa!" The adjutant suddenly shot a curse at the soldier. "Shut your big mouth. What are you getting at? Trying to teach these new soldiers bad habits? You shouldn't talk like that in front of a foreigner, either."

"You may curse me all you like," said the soldier more slowly, and in a serious manner, "but you know what I say is true. I've seen it and they haven't. I know and they don't. But why try and hide it? What's more, I got a right to talk. . . ."

"All right. All right. Only keep it to yourself."

Not until deep in the night—just as the old soldier had said—did we start. The train suddenly gave a terrific jerk, then a forward and backward lurch. We were all thrown into a heap together.

"Ah, the engineer's mother."

"The bastard railway officials."

At last, we were off.

3

"They're here."

Who had said that? From where had that voice come, alive with anxiety? "Get up!" There it was again, and someone was kicking me in the side. "The line is cut." All the blood in my body congealed: Japanese. It was the Japanese! So it was they who had cut the line. Christ! Was it a trap?

I opened my eyes.

Soldiers were rolling up their blankets and pulling on their shoes. Bugles were loudly blowing. The train was slowing down and jerking convulsively with an effort to stop. Outside, a soldier and then another shot past, shouting: "The line is cut. The line is cut."

The train stopped. Everyone jumped out. Bugles blew. Soldiers fell into rank, and then they were off into the fields, one of them

calling back over his shoulder to me: "Go back! You had better go back."

The cold of the dawn gripped me. I shivered for a moment, wishing I had an overcoat. What was I to do? I felt utterly idiotic. Foolish words kept going over and over in my mind. "You are in Honan Province. . . . This is the Lunghai Railway. . . . You're scared. . . . No, you're really sick; you shouldn't be here." I was sick all right: I was paralyzed.

Finally, I became aware that about a half mile away from me something was moving through the fields. I saw some suspiciously large objects going along parallel to the tracks, and I felt myself shaking. "Tanks? That would be the last straw!" I walked cautiously along the track, back in the direction from which I had come and I soon noticed a peculiar quality about the moving objects. They were all green. They looked like trees. They were trees—moving trees.

It was no use: I couldn't think straight, even see straight. But after a while I got it. The Chinese, I decided, had disguised themselves to guard the railway. That way they wouldn't be seen from the air.

Still it was no use. Everything was uncertain. What was that they'd said? "The line is cut." Yes, to be sure; the Japanese had cut the line. But where were they? How far away were they? They might be right back of me. They might come down the track or across the fields at any minute. I had to find somebody. Otherwise, how should I know where to go? After some time, I went into the fields to look for any sort of human being. In a shelter I found a young captain.

"Where did you spring from?" he asked.

I described what had happened as briefly as possible and asked for information.

He told me that Doihara had crossed the Yellow River and cut the railway. He said that a short while before, three Chinese soldiers, on guard over a railway culvert near Lanfeng, had been lazily watching the approach of an empty freight train on its way back to Kaifeng. Suddenly, on looking up, they were dumbfounded to see the train filled with horses and Japanese soldiers. Hardly believing their own eyes, the soldiers had rushed away to the nearest post to report. But the officer in charge would not believe their story. "How can they be on a train? Where can they have come from?" The bewildered soldiers, beginning to doubt their own story, had only been

able to answer: "They must have come from heaven." In the meantime, the Lanfeng station master had become worried about an empty freight train that was long overdue from the next station. Finally, he had started up the track to look for it. Before he had gone far, he heard the sound of firing, and soon he came upon his train around which both Chinese and Japanese were battling. Unnoticed by anyone, he climbed aboard the locomotive, where he found the Chinese engineer lying on the floor, badly wounded, and immediately drove the whole train off. The Japanese, who, it developed, were heavily armed cavalry raiders, had been so alarmed by this apparent magic that they immediately fled. Where they were now, the captain did not know. Everything was in an uproar. The Japanese were moving about in independent columns in a sort of super-guerrilla warfare, with heavy tanks leading the way and airplanes to guide them. "They might pop up anywhere at any time," the captain said.

I tried to digest this, but it wouldn't stay down. "Tell me," I said, "where are the Japanese now?"

"That's the amazing part of the whole thing," said the captain in a tone of distressed embarrassment. "Last night, they were over near Lanfeng, but I haven't heard a thing this morning; I can't get in touch with anybody. I sent two runners out, but they haven't come back. Whether the Japanese are still east of Lanfeng or have come west of it in this direction is hard to say. You can't tell a thing with this kind of warfare."

"Where's the army headquarters, then?"

"Well, it's as I say. I don't want to deceive you. Last night it was over near Lanfeng some place—just where, I don't know—but whether it's still there—that's something else again."

"Just one thing more. I'm not very familiar with this country. Tell me what I ought to do. Where can I go?"

"Hell! . . . You'd better go back to Kaifeng. No. . . . That's not far enough; go all the way back to Chengchow."

"But I just came from there. It seems kind of useless. . . ."

"Well, what do you want? What are you looking for?"

"I don't exactly know. I want to see."

"Hmmm. This is not a play in the theatre, you know."

"But . . ."

"Oh, don't think I don't understand. What is it to me? I ought to tell you to go back. Anybody else would. But what is it to me any-

way? Sure, it's a good idea. What does it matter what happens to any of us? Yes, go there and have a look. Study it. Think about it. Write about it. No Chinese ever writes about—this. A foreigner might as well."

"Thanks. But where do I go? How do I go?"

"Look! Do it this way. Wait here with me until late afternoon. If there are any raiding Japanese columns about, they won't come out in the dark. Anyway, you can see them coming or hear them and they can't see you. Give you plenty of time to get away. Just walk up this track until you get to Lanfeng. Walk fast, because if you don't find our troops before daylight, you had better start back this way. If our troops have left Lanfeng, you'll know because you'll probably meet them coming back in the dark. All you have to worry about is one of these raiding columns of Japanese. When you get to Lanfeng, ask somebody for the headquarters of the Seventy-first Army.² If you don't see anyone, just walk north of the Lanfeng station in the direction of the river."

"Sounds vague."

"What's it matter?"

"Okay."

"Sure. That's the stuff. Do you good. How can a foreigner know anything about China unless he knows what we have to put up with? Anyway, you're young like me. . . . Look, please write your address in this book. When I'm wounded, they'll take me to Hankow and I'll come and see you. Anyway, we'll meet after the war and talk it over."

"Sure, after the victory, we'll talk it over."

"Sure."

4

Coinlike, the moon rolled through the sky, strewing herself generously on the passive earth beneath. Pools of light swam everywhere in the darkness and everything was heavy and diffused.

Toward three o'clock in the morning, the Lanfeng station became greenly emergent. It was in shreds. A freight car had crawled half-way up on the platform and lay there like a wounded beast with great gashes running through its iron sides. The rails were tortured—like snakes in loops and spirals. One line, among many, was untouched, usable for traffic.

² "Army" in Chinese terminology corresponds to our "corps."

A half mile or more away, the walls of Lanfeng rose up mediævally under the moon. I walked to it. The town was a shambles. The roofs were shot to pieces; the houses were torn open; the people had fled; and the streets, thick with rubble, were ghostly quiet.

I stumbled on through the ruins with strange awe.

Whish! What was that? Something had brushed against me. Unseen presences were whistling around in the dark and I could feel the wind of them as they passed me. A ghastly, mournful howling rent the air and the moon blinked unsteadily. In her green light, a pack of thin, bony dogs suddenly materialized, prancing like ghouls on a mountain of rubbish in a high circle around and above me. Like bandits of the night, they fought among themselves, growling and snarling over the rubbish loot. Across the sounds of their hungry bickerings suddenly rang a shrill anguished cry, like a woman wailing. Quick as magic, the dogs vanished. In the distance the sound of them grew fainter—pat, pat, pat-a-pat-pat in the night.

I went on.

Light came. The sky was the color of a fish stomach. Ahead was a rubbly building. Grass stuck out between the bricks. At the door, around a large black iron teapot, lolled a few figures, messy in dirty police uniforms.

"Comrades, where is the headquarters of the Seventy-first Army?"

"Who are you? What brings you here?"

"I am an American reporter."

"So you want to see what's going on. Well, you'll find plenty to satisfy your curiosity."

"Can you direct me to headquarters?"

"No."

"Why not?"

"How should we know it?"

"It is a secret?"

"Oh, why not tell him?"

"Listen, please. I'm a stranger. I've never been here before. Why don't you help me?"

"Well, I wouldn't go out there if I were you."

"No, we can't show you."

"Too dangerous."

"Too many bandits about."

"Here, have a cup of tea. One of them took the iron teakettle and

poured out a rough, strong brew. "You must excuse us. We'd like to show you the way . . . what's it to us?—especially since you're an American; but as I say, you must excuse us: we're all at sevens and eights here. A week of bombing. Look at it. . . ." He made a derisive gesture toward a heap of ruins. "Nobody here at all. Would you believe it? We don't know whether we are in the police or in the army."

They were bewildered, that was clear. But nothing else was clear. A ruined town with no people in it. A few policemen, but nobody to guard. Everything had an air of what's-the-use about it. Neither the town nor the cops gave a damn.

Finally, one of them said: "I'll take you." He put his revolver in his wooden holster and slung the holster over his shoulder; then we walked out of the walls, moving across the sand dunes toward the north.

About a mile away, we came to the headquarters of the Seventy-first Army—just three mud houses, isolated in the sand dunes and half concealed by a few trees. A camouflaged automobile was standing near. Otherwise, it was not identifiable from the air.

"Go on in there," said my police escort. "I don't want to go in there."

A lone soldier said the commander was sleeping, so I sat down on a rock to wait. The sun was just coming up. The soldier kept looking at it as if to make sure it was definitely going to rise. He was walking aimlessly; his hands were thrust into the waist of his trousers, and his coat was unbuttoned; he was sloppy. Across the white of his undershirt I caught the big Chinese characters, "Loyally Revenge the Country."

The soldier suddenly stopped near me, and, jerking his head toward the sun, said with an air of relieved satisfaction: "It's coming up."

"Yeah, it always does," I said. I was tired.

The soldier spat on the ground. "Chinese soldiers are rotten."

I waited for him to explain this remark, but he said nothing. He seemed to have plucked the remark out of the air. I was not surprised. Nobody seemed to carry on connected conversations any more.

"What illustrious division are you with?" I said.

"Wounded Soldiers' Division." He displayed the armband on his coat. I made out the character for "bravery."

"Wounded soldiers fight better." He spat on the ground. Suddenly, he turned.

Along the dirt highway, a few yards distant, a dozen or so soldiers without arms, were hurrying by toward the west. My companion yelled but, after turning a sharp glance in our direction, they hurried on again faster than before.

"Look at them!" he said.

"What about them?"

"Aren't they in a hurry, though?"

"Where are they going?"

"Running away. Babies!" He spat on the ground again.

"Who are they?"

"Eighty-eighth Division."

"That's a famous division."

"Yeah. Famous in the Shanghai War under Sun Yuan-liang. Now. . . ." He spat on the ground.

"How is the fighting going?" I asked.

"Fighting? Crap. We're not fighting. Rotten. Rotten, I tell you."

"Seems quiet," I said.

"Sure. Sure. But yesterday, they came back three miles. *Hsia kua la.*"

"What's that mean?"

"*Hsia kua la*, I tell you. *Hsia kua la*. Don't you know what that means? Defeated. Beaten. They ran away."

"How many of the enemy were there?"

"He has no force. It's this Eighty-eighth Division. Can't fight."

"Don't the new soldiers fight well? I hear they fight very well."

He laughed. "Propaganda." Suddenly, he turned a friendly grin on me. "They're babies. Can't fight. Just babies. Wounded soldiers are not babies. They know how to fight."

"But . . ."

"No buts about it. We're not fighting well. We're getting licked. You don't believe. All right, you'll see. You'll see."

5

Lieutenant-General Sung Hsi-lien, commander of the Seventy-first Army, was one of the darlings of Chiang Kai-shek, a favorite Whampoa cadet, German-trained. His Thirty-sixth Division, along with the Eighty-seventh and Eighty-eighth, had gone through the

Shanghai War almost from beginning to end, right up to the debacle within the walls of Nanking—four months without being withdrawn from the lines. As a result of the Nanking disgrace, his youthful and rising military star, along with those of his Whampoa brothers in arms, Wang Chiang-kiu and Sun Yuan-liang, had suffered a decline. Perhaps that terrible event had changed him, for I did not find him full of the pride and arrogance which other Whampoa cadets said they found so distasteful. In fact, he was so extremely informal that I found it natural as sin to lie on his camp cot and listen to the orders which he was transmitting over the telephone to the various divisions under him.

He sat at a rude table with a map before him and a telephone almost continually in his hand. His chief of staff kept coming in and going out, making brief incisive comments on the situation. They were trying to organize their line of battle and stabilize the front. Under Sung at the moment were the Hundred Ninety-fifth Division and parts of the Hundred Sixth, the Sixty-first and the famous Eighty-seventh and Eighty-eighth Divisions. The Forty-sixth, with which I had traveled on the train, was coming into line and the Thirty-sixth was on the way.

The order of battle, however, was not so simple a thing as putting down division numbers on paper. In the first place, what was a division? You never could be sure: it might be a regiment; it might be two or it might just be a couple of battalions. It was all the fault of the communications, to be sure: the troops weren't getting up there all in one piece. Divisions and regiments were jumbled up like stew: somebody was making a hash of things.

Another thing—the soldiers were almost all new. Even the Eighty-seventh and Eighty-eighth Divisions, once the cream of the army—they called them "Chiang's own"—were composed almost solely of new, raw recruits who had been thrown into the ranks after the complete decimation of the old cadres during the Shanghai War. They were such a far cry from the organizations that had started that battle, they were so raw and inexperienced, so rotten, that even to their own commanders they seemed but a makeshift fighting force. Thus Major-General Wang Ching-kiu, a favorite of the Generalissimo, and considered by German advisers one of the best of the Whampoa cadets, thought so little of his charges that he refused to take command of them when ordered to do so, and, pretending that he was ill, he sulked behind in his tent at Lowang, refusing to

come to Lanfeng, while his troops were now at the front under another commander. You can imagine what a mess this created. As the battle started, troops were not under their own commanders and staff officers were working with men under whom they had never fought before—a very great handicap in a semi-feudal society dominated by personal relationships.

Now, as I sat there, listening to one side of numerous telephone conversations, there took place within my mind a sort of mental crystallization which allowed me to form a general picture of what was happening at the front. Vague and disconnected as those telephonic remarks were, there nevertheless emerged from them an idea which bore some resemblance to what was happening.

The Hundred Ninety-fifth Division was running away under artillery fire. It was demoralizing and disorganizing the rest of the front. Sung had to send them to the rear for retraining.

The idea that the front was undergoing any essential change, however, did not penetrate the minds of the staff without resistance. This is not strange. For fear is not always panic, and new soldiers that at first run away may be reorganized, whipped into shape and made to hold. An enemy thrust does not always mean a wedge in your lines; a wedge in your lines does not always mean your lines have been broken; and a breakthrough at one point does not signify the breaching of the whole front; for a front is like a rubber band: it stretches and often bounces back again without breaking.

Now, however, fresh reports indicated that a qualitative change was taking place in our position, and I became aware of this as soon as Sung asked me to go to the adjutant's quarters so that I could be properly "entertained." He did not want me around.

The adjutants tried to cheer me up. They themselves were rather disgruntled. They didn't like the way Sung was doing things. This grew out of the fact that they did not belong to Sung but were normally on the staff of Wang Ching-kiu who had refused to take over the Lanfeng command. The chief adjutant, a comical fellow with glasses, however, insisted on "entertaining" me with his "funny" stories.

"You see," he said, "there was an American missionary and a Chinese traveling together. Ha! Ha! This is very funny. The missionary saw a peach and he said; 'What's that?' 'Why, that's a peach,' said the Chinese. 'Good heavens! is that really a peach?' said the missionary. 'I thought it was a grape. Peaches grow ten times as big as

that in America.' In a little while they passed a horse and the missionary said: 'What's that?' 'A horse, of course,' said the Chinese. 'A horse!' said the missionary. 'Really, you don't say. I thought it was a dog. Such a small animal we would only use as a pet around the house in America.' That night the missionary and the Chinese came to an inn and the Chinese to play a joke on the missionary put a tortoise in his bed before going to sleep. Now, here's the end of the story. In the middle of the night the missionary woke the whole inn, screaming bloody murder. When a light was brought, everyone saw a huge tortoise hanging grimly to the missionary's toe. Now, here it comes. . . . 'Heavens alive! what is that?' said the missionary. 'Why, that's only a Chinese bedbug,' said the Chinese."

The room shook with the delighted roars of his listeners, and they poked me in the ribs—"Ho-ho-ho"—guffawing with all their might.

Whew! I thought. That's terrible. And determined not to endure any more of it, I took off my shoes and prepared to get to sleep.

Far away, there was a deep growling rumble, like distant thunder.

6

When I woke, the room was a bedlam of noise, everyone was talking at once, the ground was trembling and the adjutant was shaking me to rouse me.

"Mr. Pai, Mr. Pai!" he kept saying, "the general wants to see you. Hurry. You are going back to Chengchow."

"Why—what's the matter? I just came from there."

"Listen to the big guns," said the adjutant.

I hastily pulled on my shoes and ran out. As I did so, I heard a petulant voice exclaiming: "Wang never did it this way. What's Sung up to? It'll all be in a mess." At the door carriers were gathered, tying their ropes about the green tin record boxes with nimble fingers. The roar of the guns grew louder and louder.

"Make haste, Mr. Pai, if you want to get out of here in time," shouted an adjutant as I ran toward the commander's house.

Before the commanders' quarters was a small group, standing silently as if entranced, with a tense, expectant look on their faces, and I turned and saw spread out before me a strange scene. Ahead and to the left stood the walled city of Lanfeng, silent and impres-

sive; straight ahead were the rolling sand dunes that I had crossed in the early morning; now they were no longer empty desolate wastes but were swarming with a mass of soldiers whose movements in the indistinct gray afternoon air were uncertain. Beyond that lay the narrow ribbon that was the Lunghai Railway tracks and further forward, on the other side of the tracks, clumps of trees and tiny coagulations of huts, small hamlets—all wreathed in smoke. From somewhere in that plain on the other side of the tracks, from dead ahead of us and from the left of us came a full, deep-throated rumble, followed by puffs of smoke and sharp, battering echoes. Out of the fields and bushes and houses columns of smoke were jetting up like fumes from a jinni's bottle. Boom, boom, bangbang-bang. The shells marched forward. Crack! Bang! A grove of trees parted as if some huge animal were breaking through them. Crash! The trees disappeared, and the shells with a smash pounced upon a settlement of houses and kicked them into the air. At a distance the debris-laden smoke seemed to rise foul and dirty. Still, the shells marched forward, yard by yard, clattering nearer the railway.

I tore myself from this scene and went toward the commander's hut. Boxes, beds, coolies and soldiers were milling in confusion outside his door. The roar of the shells was growing louder and the little building trembled.

As I stepped in, Major-General Sung Hsi-lien looked up from a map.

"I'm sorry I haven't had time to entertain you. Please go back to Chengchow."

"I don't want to go back to Chengchow."

"I'm leaving."

"I shall go with you."

Sung raised his eyebrows with a look of surprise. "I am going to fight a mobile warfare. We won't stay in any one place. We shall march a hundred li a day."

"Good! I shall go with you."

"Please go back to Chengchow. I can't be responsible for your death."

A violent detonation outside added emphasis to his remark.

The commander looked up and eyed me severely. "You must have the goodness to go away; you cannot remain here."

"He thinks I am in the way," I said to myself. "Well, he shan't get rid of me."

Finally, he begged me at least to have the goodness to return to Kaifeng, promising to recommend me to the highest authorities so that I could get all the news I wanted.

"Either that or go with the Twenty-seventh Army. They've just come. You can go with Chief of Staff Tsai. He is here now."

I accepted this last alternative.

7

As Tsai and I came out of the hut, the continual thunder of the guns was swelling louder and louder, especially over on the left in the vicinity of the station. Overhead on the other side of the tracks, like a watching vulture in the atmosphere, hung a Japanese balloon, flabby and bloated and sinister. The crowd was jumping up and down with excitement.

"They'll get it. They'll get it."

"Oh, why don't they hurry?"

"They're doomed, I tell you. Doomed."

"Chief of Staff, a train just came in with a regiment of the Thirty-sixth Division. Now the Devil's balloon has gone up. If they see the train, they'll switch their guns on the station and smash them before they can get out."

The chief of staff nodded briefly; then followed by the head of his operations section, he led the way to a sedan car and we got in and turned off to the left, heading for the station.

We soon found ourselves riding through the ranks of an infantry regiment; we tried in vain to get out of the midst of men, but they were on all sides of us with angry, sullen faces, cursing and shouting and knocking against one another. At each instant the road became more encumbered, but as we went forward the faces of the soldiers took on a subtle change. Now they were no longer coming toward us with mad, the-hell-with-you countenances, but were slinking along close to the wall of Lanfeng, clinging to it as if for protection, and they had a furtive, criminal look about them. They were not marching; they were only going, without order, without leaders, without any apparent purpose or destination, hunched up, and skating over the ground with a fast little pace that quickened the nearer we came to the railroad tracks.

There was not a civilian in sight, not a coolie, not a farmer, not a peasant; only the soldiers and at their back the continual thump-

ing, thumping of guns, and great columns of smoke shooting into the air high above the railway embankment.

Alternately thickening and thinning, the soldiers were now passing us in great haste. I sat in the car without comprehending and saw them half running, half walking, and I only knew that we were going toward what they were running away from.

Suddenly, a soldier turned and I saw the insignia "88" on his armband. With a sharp gasp I recalled the words the soldier had said to me in the morning: "They are only babies; they can't fight."

"Goddam this Eighty-eighth!" muttered the chief of staff, squirming around in his seat beside me.

At this moment a soldier with the insignia "46" on his armband came running toward us with his arms raised in the air. He was yelling something but we couldn't make it out. The chauffeur shot on the brakes and Tsai leaned out of the car.

"Don't go over there, Chief," panted the soldier. "They're hitting the station."

So they'd got the trainload of the Thirty-sixth, had they?

The chauffeur tried to swing westward, but there was no road. The sand piled up around the hubcaps. We had to get out. As soon as we set foot on the ground, a heap of soldiers, porters and donkeys rushed down on us. We were caught like chips in a storm; the flood of the soldiery for a moment carried us backward; then the whirlpool spun us around and we were knocked about from side to side.

Completely bewildered, I saw the chief of staff lay his hand on the shoulder of the young soldier who had originally stopped us. His mouth was wide open and his eyes were glistening with excitement as the officer shouted at him:

"Anyone from the Forty-sixth who retreats will be executed. Tell that to your regiment commander."

Swinging around, the chief of staff strode out into the center of road where a soldier of the Eighty-eighth Division was hopping up and down in anger, cursing a donkey who had suddenly decided to stop where he was.

"Come on, you bastard! Come on! I swear I'll leave you right where you are. Get going, you bastard. All right, don't say I didn't tell you."

With that remark, the soldier left the donkey's side and started to hurry down the road, but the chief of staff grabbed his arm and shook him.

"Where are you going? Don't run wildly. Be calm. Be calm."

The two staff officers then walked forward into the worst of the hubbub and I hesitantly followed them. They paused for a moment and I stood near them to contemplate the scene: it was magnificent beyond description. Ahead of us was a railway embankment, and it was a dividing line between life and death, for the shells were all striking on the other side, and there it was that a theatrical performance was being played out on a titanic scale. The trees and houses sent up a sheet of flame through the dark masses of smoke that overhung the field; through this vaporous cloud could be seen nothing but running figures; guns were belching forth fire and death on every side; the roaring and the shouting were inextricably mixed; the shells kept pouring down and their effect was magical. Through the smoke we could see helmets falling, men plunging through the sands with scared and tense faces, carriers hurling themselves forward and dropping their baggage as they heard the whine of the projectiles coming after them—everyone rushing toward the railway embankment, clambering up over the top and tumbling down on our side.

The Eighty-eighth was pouring across the tracks in waves, pounding like the surf against a breakwater and foaming over the embankment. Many of them were burdened down with bundles fastened to the two ends of their carrying poles. These they whirled and swung about with marvelous agility as they twisted and dodged and ran across the sands, now dropping to their knees, now running on again, now dropping, now running. There was a peculiar rhythm to it. Whine and fall. Explode and run. Shrill and drop. Crash and rise.

Soon they broke completely, each man striking out for himself, in all directions, running blindly, instinctively, opening out over the sand flats in a great fan of flying figures, until there was no longer any order, no longer any body of troops, no longer any Eighty-eighth Division, but only a noncoherent mass of individuals each following the dictates of his own will, determined on only one thing—flight.

I was frightened. I was deafened by the roar of the guns. I was panic-stricken at the turbulence of the flight. What was I doing here anyhow? If anything happened, who would look out for me? It was one of the few times I had gone unnoticed in a crowd of Chinese soldiers. No one here thought of looking at the foreigner,

of pointing a finger at him, of being surprised or amused at his presence.

"Look!" shouted a voice in my ear. "Look!"

"They got away."

"Here they come."

Out of the smoke and the dust and the chaos appeared a disciplined column of soldiers, coming toward us, their bare legs going up and down in double-quick time, a young officer running along beside them, shouting them forward. Their rifles were bobbing about as they came toward us in a fast little lope, their young faces glowing with exertion and excitement, their tan-green uniforms spotlessly clean—not a sign of blood, not a drop of grease, not a mark of service. Boys. All boys, at the front for the first time. This was the regiment of the Thirty-sixth Division which had just disembarked from the train.

A whistle blew. The column halted.

"About face."

"Deploy for action."

Up went the machine guns. Down went the soldiers, one line back of another, in stagger formation. And there they were, flat on their bellies, nuzzling into the sand behind their rifles and machine guns, their defense drawn deep, hiding behind the sand dunes, the only cover in a flat terrain, ready, waiting, exhibiting a strange calmness, all eyes turned toward their officer, cold, vital, snapping out above them with a quick, vigorous walk, watchful, alert, scanning their every movement.

And then the storm struck them. A fresh wave of the Eighty-eighth Division swept up over the tracks and poured down on them like a flood through a broken dike. Their ranks were confounded; their machine guns were upset; their bodies were trampled underfoot; and their heads were smashed by swinging baggage.

"Calm! Calm!" shouted the regiment commander.

Not a soldier of the Thirty-sixth moved; not a man fled. Why? What kept them there? What?

The running, jostling flight of the Eighty-eighth continued. The smothering flood of them hit us broadside. And after them came the artillery shells in relentless pursuit, roaring at their heels.

"Bam!" With a terrible, an awful crash, the first shell exploded on our side of the tracks.

The chief of staff, marching forward with a map clasped in his hand, called over his shoulder to me: "Don't be afraid."

"No, I—I'm all right," I stammered. But I did not finish. A shell rending the air made me duck my head. A nervous thrill ran down my spinal column.

A strong wind whistled out of the leaden afternoon sky and sent the sand hissing in fine sprays across the flats. In a moment the wind began to howl; the plain was scourged by its fury; the whole earth rose as one solid storm of hard, stinging, cutting grains. Beneath the veil of the flying grains, the soldiers were buried; the retreating Eighty-eighth was enveloped in a sand fog; everything was hidden in a gray, yellow mist. How like a nightmare it was! Everything indistinct, uncertain, blurred. But nothing could hide the flight of the Eighty-eighth, and I saw the soldiers through the haze drop their bundles and plough through the sand, blindly, with arms outstretched, tripping over the guns and the bodies of the Thirty-sixth. And still the Thirty-sixth lay motionless, every soldier's face forward.

Although the shells kept pouring down, giving us little time for contemplation, I soon noticed that something peculiar was taking place within me. I seemed to be much larger than usual and growing and swelling with each moment of passing time; a tremendous energy gripped me and I felt as if I could pick up the whole railway line and crunch it to bits; my whole body was one burning glow and this seemed to transfer itself to the objects around me; for everything was bathed in a blurry radiance. But most curious of all, I was not only tingling with delirious excitement, but, to my great astonishment, I realized that I was almost panting with a sexual kind of pleasure, and I found myself leaning against the wind, surrendering to the rough caress of the sand, pulsing and throbbing and thrilling to the crashing, tumultuous orchestration of the shells which were now beating the earth about us with a punishing, orgiastic frenzy.

The shells fell like hail. Several men were laid low; one fellow, struck as he came up over the embankment, tumbled down and slid back, clutching with his hand at some indefinable object. I imagined him giving a groan of despair.

The chief of staff at this moment was coolness personified. As he went forward, picking his way here and there among the bodies, the young soldiers kept their eyes to the front as if they were sud-

denly inspirited by his presence. With a map in one hand he carefully explained the position to the young regiment commander, and the two of them standing there amid the prostrate soldiers, lashed by a sea of shells, stood out sharp and clear like twin beacons.

The enemy kept up a constant and destructive fire. However, at the moment, perfect silence reigned in the ranks. It was noble to see the boys of the Thirty-sixth Division lying there, not saying a word, while the soldiers of the Eighty-eighth Division groped their way blindly through them. As I went forward, one of them fell, horribly lacerated, and looked up at me with a sort of reproachful groan.

A shell went singing overhead and then another. They were evidently aimed at us but they flew too far and fell beyond and behind us. As they passed over, I held my breath, wincing at the thought of them.

A rain of shells was falling to the left of us, not far from the tracks. Everything whirled and swam before my eyes.

Suddenly, an agonizing, a Gargantuan shriek, as if someone were laboring in mortal agony, clove the atmosphere, and an empty passenger train rushed into sight, backing frantically between us and the guns. The engineer had found it too hot in the station and he was trying to get away.

With a terrific rattle and roar, this long vertebrate mass, belching fire and smoke, came plunging backward like a clumsy dragon. It went faster and faster and the engineer hung on the whistle, shrieking his defiance.

But what we saw, the watchers in the balloon also saw. And the train is not built that will outspeed a shell. And so if the train went faster, what of that? The shells went faster even still.

And they hunted down that train as you would hunt down a wolf galloping alongside your car over the Mongolian steppes, as you would fire on a rabbit in a shooting gallery, as you would play a game—a ghastly, thrilling, uneven game—with all the odds on your side.

A train is not a target you can miss, especially if you are watching from a balloon. A few swift orders, a rapid calculation on paper, a tiny, infinitesimal shifting of the guns, a few swift strokes this way, a slight correction for error, then a few broad strokes that way—and so the shells crack down fifty yards from the engine, now twenty-five yards—just seventy-five feet between that burst of flying

shot and that puffing, panting locomotive. And in a moment—poof! Where will your engine be?

The men flat on their bellies in the sand crawled up along the top of the dunes to watch. They raised themselves to their knees, half daring to forget about the shells; then one by one they stood up. They guessed this thing—this human thing of iron—held some subtle, some deep and hidden meaning in their lives. And they listened to that engine shrieking as they might have listened to some anguished human calling for their help. And these poor slaves gave the only thing they had. Mouths were open, aching with hope. Many stood on tiptoe, and I did, too, pressing, pushing with desire tearing at our hearts, praying that for once the dirty, scared underdog might win out, the frightened, fleeing fugitive—just this once—might escape.

“Go! Go! Go!” The wind caught up the cries of the soldiers and threw them about the sand dunes. “Go on, train. Go! Go! Go!”

“Open her up, engineer.”

“Run.”

“Fly.”

Wham! A shell cracked down in front of the engine. A puff of smoke jumped out of the ground. Wham! Wham! A cloud of smoke enveloped the engine, wrapping it from sight. It seemed to be gone.

“Oh!” cried a soldier. “He’ll catch it now.”

“He should never have come out.”

“He should have waited till dark.”

“He’ll never make it.”

“Yes, he will. Go on, train. Go on.”

Wham! Wham! Wham! Clouds of purplish black and brown smoke whirled up around the locomotive and mingled with the smoke pouring out of her stack; the clatter of the explosives merged with the panting of her engines and the roar of her churning wheels, and through it all went the high-pitched scream of the whistle. The engineer was drugging himself with sound.

Behind the smoke, the locomotive shuddered convulsively, the cars vibrated horribly, and the long, vertebrate mass seemed about to disintegrate and fly off into space before our eyes.

“Ai ya! he’s done for.”

At this instant, a series of high, shrill whines rang through the air, a tremendous shock jangled all the rails and the ground shook; a

sheet of flame sprang up around the locomotive wheels, and a terrific shriek ending in an explosive rattle jarred the train to its very foundations. There was no doubt about it; it was all over. I turned away.

When I looked again, I saw a roaring, belching monster, a thing of flesh and iron, somehow—don't ask me how—hurling itself backward in frenzied jerks, still fleeing from the mass of shot and steel that still pursued. And as I watched, the train tore into a grove of trees and was wrapped from sight.

The soldiers stared into the distance at the trees, then turned to look at one another, with faces tense and strained eyes. They remained thus for a few moments; then the hard lines in their faces grew soft and they looked at each other with questioning eyes, turning their heads from side to side as if listening for something.

A soldier stood up and shouted: "He made it. Those liver-eating dwarfs! He made it. . . . That good old engineer! . . . His mother! . . . He made it."

Then they were all standing on their feet, shouting, slapping each other on the back and crying out at the only victory they'd ever seen.

"He did it. That good old Chinese locomotive . . . went faster than the Devils' shells . . . the engineer . . . long, long live the engineer!"

Just then a crash shook the sky at our right and in our rear the earth trembled and the soldiers threw themselves to the ground.

"Ai ya! The robbers' guns are everywhere. Now they're in our rear. We're boxed in."

But it was thunder and not shellfire that was exploding from this new direction. The sky grew darker, the air became heavier and the wind howled loudly across the flats. It bent down the heads of scrub bushes and whirled up the sand into brown spiraling clouds.

The flabby Japanese balloon came down from the sky. The air rapidly cooled. Through the atmosphere went a queer rushing noise. A few drops of rain fell and then, without warning, large lumps of ice shot down. They grew harder and larger until they were as big as golf balls and almost as hard. A soldier struck on the head rolled over, unconscious. His companions burrowed into the sand, trying to escape. I covered my head with a small rucksack captured from the Japanese; a few soldiers put on their helmets, but most of them had to lie there unprotected, offering their bodies as targets to the descending hail.

Suddenly, the shellfire ceased. The storm had overcome the Japanese artillery.

We looked at one another, silently, thankfully, but the hailstones were now shooting down with such violence that our cup of misery still seemed full.

"Come on!" cried Tsai and we ran for the cover of a group of huts that lay on the south side of the railway tracks. A few minutes ago we should not have dared go there, but now it seemed safer and we were anxious to find any shelter, wherever it was.

It was getting dusk. The wind was blowing the smoke away and off the field. The acrid burning smell was now not so sharp. The earth covered with hard, white balls gave off a cleaner, fresher smell. We went carefully for fear of turning an ankle. We were looking for the headquarters of the Twenty-Seventh Army Corps. Where the Japanese were, we did not know.

8

The storm had abated. After all the agitation and the incessant din of battle how restful was the stillness, but how uncertain! What was happening? Where was the enemy? Where were the Chinese? Where even was headquarters? It was at a place called Lilo, but where was that? How could you know if you had never been there before? If there were no one to tell you?

The mud and plaster huts where we had sought shelter were dark and empty—not even a stick of furniture; only an old woman, all by herself, absolutely alone. What a horrible crone she was! Why hadn't she fled? Had they left her behind because she was crazy? What a disgusting cackling noise she made! Couldn't she talk? "Where is Lilo?" we said. She laughed. "Please tell us where Lilo is," we said. She laughed. "We'll give you money," we said. She laughed. We asked and asked, but she wouldn't do anything but laugh. "You're a dirty, stupid old witch," we said, and then she laughed louder than ever.

In the closed and foul darkness of the hut, she kept moving about like an unclean ghost. "Ugh!" she was brushing against me. "Damn old bitch! Get the hell out of here!" I muttered the words, but it was only with an effort that I kept from screaming at her. She was mumbling and humming incoherently to herself.

Ta mi, ta mi, tami,
Shih. Shih. Shih.

"Damn old loon! I have no sympathy for you. Go off and die." I felt no guilt at this imprecation. I wanted one thing only: to get away some place and forget all I had seen, to lie down and rest and get out of this uncertainty.

At last, in desperation we struck out west and south. The sun had gone down; it was just getting twilight; still, everything was quite visible; for the white hail balls, only just beginning to melt, served to light up the countryside.

After walking about three li, we came upon a peasant. He was running around a tree. We stopped, dumbfounded. The peasant was going around and round and round; the hailstones under the impetus of his feet were kicking and rolling along the ground, some of them were flying a few paces through the air—little pellets of white in the dusk—and his two hands were pressed to the sides of his head so that his elbows stuck out, angular like antlers. He seemed to be drawing a magic circle around the tree—a circle from which there was no escape. And there they were—the peasant and the tree, seemingly fixed in eternal relation to each other, as the hub of the wheel to its rim. It was a reeling *dance macabre*, without beginning and without end. It seemed impossible that the peasant could keep up his dizzy circuit, but it seemed just as impossible that he would ever stop.

The chief of staff sucked in his breath sharply. "Whew!" he shook his head.

"Hey, old countryman, where is Lilo?"

"Oh, good evening, master," replied the peasant. He did not stop his running for a moment.

"Can you tell us where Lilo is?"

"Are you out for a walk?"

"Yes. And you?"

"Oh, not a bit of it."

"Well, we are out for a walk. We are walking to Lilo. Are we on the right road?"

"No, I'm not out for a walk. I'm looking at the fields. Pretty, aren't they? So full of things. Wheat, birds and Devils. My goodness, you have no idea what big Devils."

The chief of staff groaned. "Madmen! All of them. What's the matter with these people?"

"Listen! Where is Lilo?"

"The Eastern Ocean Men have come."

"Oh, ho! So that's it."

"That's it. They've come."

"Never mind."

"I won't give it a thought. But . . . they've come."

"It doesn't matter. It's all right. We Chinese soldiers are here."

"It doesn't matter?"

"That's right."

"The Eastern Ocean Devils have come on the south."

"On the south, you say?"

"They've come." He ran around faster and faster. "Oh! Oh! My daughter and my wife—oh!"

"Now look here! where is Lilo?"

"I went back and couldn't find them."

"Couldn't find who?"

"How bitter are the old hundred names!"

"I'll give you some bitterness to eat. . . . Now, stop that insane running. Are you going to tell us where Lilo is or do we have to . . . ?"

"My daughter and my wife!"

"All right—out with it! What's happened?"

"I couldn't find them. Two big birds. This evening we shall not eat soup. Ma Ma Hoo—Hoo—Hoooooooooooo. What soft eyes had she, all alone in a tree!"

All atremble with fascination, I stood stock still and heard these words coming out of the mouth of this human merry-go-round—words, now loud as the peasant drew near us on his mad circuit, now soft as he flew away on the far edge of the circle. There was something uncanny about the way his words flew off at tangents into the air, as if each one had a different destination in separate quarters of the earth, as if they were heading for a final home and resting place, perhaps to gather, to collect, to form into some whole and create—but how—some meaning, some ultimate, final sense. I forgot everything, the battle, the exhaustion of my body, the uncertainty of the situation. The peasant's reeling movements and weird words fascinated me beyond and to the exclusion of everything else. Madly, the thought came to me that I ought to jump into that circle and dash around the tree with the peasant. I grew tense with a struggle between mad desire and faltering reason. I had to jump into that circle. Like some people who have to touch telegraph poles, I had to jump into the circle.

Just as I took a hesitant step forward, the peasant came to a sudden stop. For a moment my legs disintegrated; then the spell was broken. The peasant glared wrathfully at us, then looked at us with a hurt, bewildered stare. After eyeing us cunningly for a time, he clenched his fist, swung his arm in one great arc toward the ground and, shouting out the word "Devils," sprang off down the path and disappeared from sight.

There was a moment of silence. Then came quick words, each one growing fainter than the last. "My wife, my wife, my daughter and my wife . . . oh! . . . what soft eyes had she . . . on the south, on the south, on the south."

Mother of God! I thought. Is this the world we live in? Is this the tree? Is this the sand? Is this the sky? Is this the path? The bloody, corpse-strewn road? Where? Down what blind alley?

The three of us remained for a long while, looking each other in the eyes. At last the chief of staff sighed: "Ai ya! There's no help for it. Let's go down here."

We turned down a small path, moving toward the west. Suddenly, a fellow in uniform shot by us on a bicycle in a terrific hurry. We leaped at him and brought him to a standstill. He was trembling and couldn't utter a word. Then he made out who we were and blurted out:

"The Forty-sixth has come down."

The chief of staff bit his lip. "How do you know?"

"They're all coming down. Everyone's coming back."

"Calm yourself. Now, tell me."

"They're all coming back, I tell you." He started to swing his leg over the bicycle. "All. Yes, yes. All of them."

"Now, take it easy. How do you know all this?"

"I just came back from the front." The soldier swung his leg over the bicycle seat and put his foot down on the pedal. "Everyone's coming. . . ."

The chief of staff lay a hand on his shoulder. "Yes, now go on. What's happened?"

"I tell you, there was no one in headquarters. There was no one there. We didn't know what was happening. Just us adjutants and no one else there. So the adjutant commander sent me up here to see how things were. We didn't know. We didn't know a thing. So I went to the firing line."

Again, the soldier started to go. The chief of staff held him with

a firm, hard voice. "You went to the firing line. Then what happened?"

"So I went there. They've all come down. All. They'll be here soon. Yes, they'll be here soon."

All the time he was talking, the adjutant was looking over his shoulder and at the same time pushing with one foot on the pedal of his bicycle which the chief of staff was holding with some difficulty. As he was restlessly jerking on his bicycle, there was over his shoulder, just where he had been looking in some alarm, a crackling, crashing sound close by. The adjutant abruptly drove down his pedal, broke away from Tsai's grasp and sped furiously away, shouting: "They're here!" Breathlessly, we looked behind us. A car was breaking through the brush beside us. A stocky figure, with two stars on his collar band, stepped out, holding a map in his hand. Tsai went up to him and said a few words.

"He's mad," said the newcomer. "Mad." Fixing the back of the retreating adjutant with a significant glance, he added: "I've just come from the front. Everything is good, very good. Nothing is happening."

Seeing me, he abruptly turned and ran over and pumped my hand hard. "Don't be afraid. This is a simple matter. Happens all the time."

I smiled and pumped his hand hard, too.

"This is Kwei Yung-ching, commander of the Twenty-seventh Corps," said Tsai.

Kwei dropped my hand and backed off a little looking at me.

"A foreigner on China's front," he said. "I'm ashamed."

He stared away for a moment, then peered into my face, speaking slowly as if he weren't sure whether I could understand Chinese.

"We are eating bitterness now. We are always eating bitterness. But"—he raised his voice, clenching his fist—"He's bitter, too. In a year He will be finished."

9

Caught off base by Doihara's sudden move across the Yellow River, with the railway cut and traffic in an uproar, suffering from shortness of supplies, receiving division reinforcements in dribbles of a battalion and a regiment at a time, directing new, raw soldiers who often were not under their own division commanders and

forced to act under circumstances unlike anything that had been foreseen, General Kwei Yung-ching with three makeshift divisions put up an improvised resistance south of the Lunghai Railway for two days. Upon receiving seventeen old Vickers tanks, a large part of the tank complement of China's only motorized division, and a few 155-mm. guns so valuable and rare that they had not been used on the front since the Shanghai War of 1937, Kwei, on May 22, put in an attack. It happened that Doihara was planning an attack at precisely the same moment, so the two forces battled each other without any result.

Doihara then moved south. Because he was getting farther away from the Lunghai Railway and the Yellow River and presumably his supplies, we thought at first that he was lashing about in a kind of super, mechanized guerrilla warfare. Then, because he was operating in our rear, we thought he was fleeing and trying to find some way to escape. Although the troops had not had the slightest victory and had lost many men through incessant, unopposed air raids; although we were living in the most miserable conditions in twelve mud houses at Lilo and in the surrounding fields, with little water and short rice rations; although reinforcements were slow in coming up and supplies were running low—in spite of all that, the move of Doihara to the south and away from the Yellow River raised the spirits of everyone. Throughout the whole headquarters, there spread the most cheerful rumors of the flight of Doihara, of his approaching capture and of an imminent Chinese victory that might change the course of the war.

"Doihara has no place to go," said General Kwei. "He is running away wildly to the south."

His staff echoed the general's hopes. Among the officers it was said that Chiang Kai-shek had promised \$100,000 for Doihara's capture.

"We'll give you a share of the reward," said a tank commander to me. "We'll bring Doihara in here so you can interview him."

On the morning of May 23, when this festive feeling was at its height, our headquarters was abruptly shaken by a rapid series of artillery bursts coming from the south and west. Everyone ran outside to see what was happening. A balloon, like some bird of evil omen, hung in the air to our south, but much further west than we supposed Doihara could be.

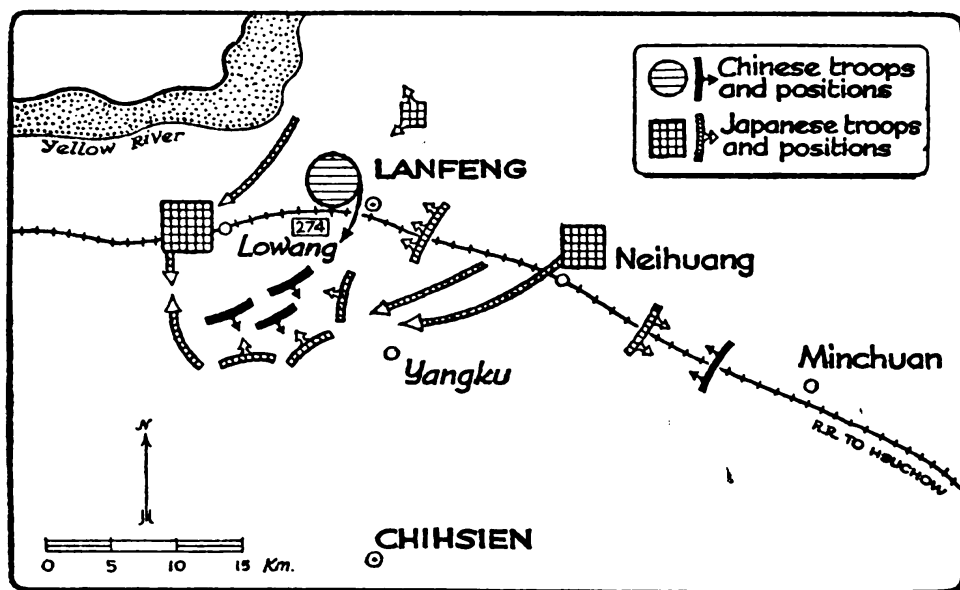
Men, with pale and puzzled faces, stared at one another in amaze-

ment and doubt. Finally, an officer spat on the ground, laughed harshly and said:

"Doihara isn't running away; he's outflanking us."

It was true. Doihara had been going faster than we had supposed, seeping around our flank, seeking to encircle us. Hour after hour his guns sent us reports of his further progress.

Now there was no longer any festive, happy feeling in the air, but



ACTION AT LANFENG

only a profound calm, a tense, silent expectancy. Were we being encircled?

In the afternoon, a farmer, disheveled and gulping with excitement, stumbled into Lilo.

"TEN THOUSAND JAPANESE ON THE NORTH!"

He shouted out these words as if he were announcing the coming of doom.

"Calm yourself," said the chief of staff in a soothing tone.

"HORSES ARE LEADING THE WAY," the peasant shouted again.

A staff officer looked at the farmer contemptuously.

"These village rumors make me sick," he said irritably. "Why waste time with the man?"

Some one led the peasant away. As he went, he cried loudly: "DEVILS COMING FROM THE NORTH!"

A moment later an army messenger brought the news that Japanese cavalry raiders had seized Lowang railway station, north and west of us.

We were surrounded.

In the best room of a peasant's mud and wattle house, General Kwei immediately called a council. The old men, women and children of the peasant's family all crowded together in a room on the other side of the passage and looked at us in some alarm. As the division commanders filed into the room, a little girl brought a pot of tea. One of the officers stroked her head and said: "Little one, you go to a rough school." The girl bent down her head and ran out, laughing. Everyone sat down around a rickety table on which lay maps, plans, pencils and orders. General Kwei remained standing, preparing to open the discussion.

Just then an orderly strode into the room, snapped smartly to attention and, saluting with exaggerated severity, said in a loud, stagey voice:

"REPORT! THIS HEADQUARTERS IS FULL OF TRAITORS."

Everyone jumped as if hit. A staff officer threw a pencil down on the table with a gesture of disgust, growling: "What madness now?"

The general frowned, waved his map at the soldier, and said: "Speak quickly. You are interrupting an important meeting."

The soldier snapped out another salute.

"Report! In a house we found a telephone and the line. . . ." He paused for a second, letting his eyes rove around the room until, like an actor, he was sure he had the attention of everybody. ". . . and the line leads south."

Clicking his heels, he saluted again.

"Reporry—t. Finished!"

Bringing his hand down, he remained stiffly at attention, looking with an impassive air at the general.

Each man at the table peered surreptitiously at his neighbor, as if trying to fathom his thoughts. The general, standing at the head of the table, for several moments stared over the heads of everyone. Tears seemed to be forming in his eyes. He blinked two or three times rapidly, then, smiling gently, he looked directly at the soldier and said in an authoritative tone: "Good! Find the traitors and execute them."

The group around the table stirred uneasily; the soldier saluted,

and went out. As soon as he had gone, General Kwei opened the discussion by a reference to our position on the map. He suggested that the tank commander attack the Japanese cavalry which had seized Lowang station. The tankman disagreed with this idea.

"It's too dangerous in the daytime," he said, picking his teeth. "Planes would destroy my tanks."

General Kwei pointed at the map and pounded the table with his other fist. "Their artillery must be found and put out of commission. Then this danger will be wiped out. You must think of the ultimate victory, not of your own safety."

"Their strength is very great. How can they be wiped out? You don't know the conditions."

"All right," said the general, smiling faintly, "do it this way. Go around to the west and find an officer and put the tanks under his command. Wait for a good opportunity and strike with the infantry. Now go quickly. Come back later and tell me about the victory."

They shook hands. The general raised a clenched fist. "Use all your strength."

As the tank commander went out, Major-General Lung Mu-an, commander of the Eighty-eighth Division, who had been late for the meeting, sidled into the house. As I looked at General Lung, I began to understand why I had seen soldiers of the Eighty-eighth running under artillery fire a few days before near Lanfeng.

He had been drawn into a long and earnest conversation with General Kwei. An argument developed. Kwei requested Lung to take his Eighty-eighth, which was not up to full strength, west and attack the Japanese near Lowang. Lung objected.

"You shouldn't be afraid," laughed the general.

"I'm not afraid. But I shouldn't go out there alone. Everyone should go together. All our forces should be pulled westward together. Then we can attack together."

The face of the general, as he stared at his division commander, remained for several instants perfectly unmoved. Then a grimace ran over it like a ripple, leaving his forehead smooth again; he bowed his head, closed his eyes, opened them again, and, smiling persuasively, spoke in an earnest manner to Lung.

"If we don't open the railway tomorrow, he'll come in back of us and cut us off. If we stay here day after day, we'll be wiped out bit by bit. We have no food, only these two wells for water and not much ammunition. We must open the line; then we can get rein-

forcements. Come on! We'll attack east and west. We'll open both sides of the railway by tomorrow. Come on!"

With his last words, Kwei reached across the table and seized Lung by the arm, looking at him with an encouraging expression. Lung flushed and looked down at the table. Seemingly only half convinced, he strode out without giving any impression that he wanted to put in an attack.

When Lung had gone, General Kwei turned to me and said: "He has no business being a division commander."

He shook his head sadly; then, with an abrupt motion, he strode over to his packsack, fished around with one hand and drew out a bottle of Kweichow wine.

"Perhaps we can find some spirit in this," he said.

He did not drink himself but passed the bottle around the table and we all gulped the wine down. It was hot and strong. At the table beside me was Brigadier-General Li Yang-ying, boyish and delicate-looking commander of the Forty-sixth Division, who was at the front for the first time in the war against Japan. I took the opportunity of asking him what he thought about the war. For an answer he picked up a glass of water and, pointing to it, said: "Now there is a force there." Then, with a quick jerk of his wrist, he flung the water on the ground, scattering it over a wide area. "Now," he said, "there is no force." It was a dramatic illustration of a theory then popular with the younger officers that if the strength of the Japanese were scattered over the vast hinterland, they could not possibly conquer China.

General Kwei, who had been watching Li out of the corner of his eye, now came up and patted him on the back. "This is a very earnest young man," he said. "He has not one bad quality, not one wrong thought in his head. But he's very young. . . ."

Abruptly, he leaned over and grasped my shoulder. "Listen," he said. "If my old soldiers were here—if they were here—I'd show you something different. They were brave fellows. I trained them and coddled them and brought them along until there was none like them. But now"—he paused, taking his hand from my shoulder—"they are all dead. I don't have time to train anyone now. And if I don't train them and they are not killed, it may be because they have run away. All the good battalion commanders are dead. Only the rotten ones keep alive. If I had my old fighting battalion com-

manders"—he reached over and pounded the table—"if I had my old soldiers. . . ."

He did not finish, but abruptly went off to a bench and sat down, resting his elbows on the table, sunk in deep thought.

After a while, he got up, walked to the telephone and began calling various regiments, seeking to encourage them. From his fragmentary questions and remarks we were able to piece together the bitter conditions among the front-line units.

He called one regiment after another. The tale from each was bitter: heavy casualties, favorite battalion commanders wounded and killed. At last, Kwei put down the phone. He was weeping.

Soundlessly, tears poured out of his red, tired eyes and rolled unheeded down his cheeks. The other officers bowed their heads and then one by one they began to walk out with that solemn and circumspect silence people exhibit in front of grief. I thought that I had penetrated an inner sanctum where I had no right to be, but I could not move or take my eyes off his weeping face.

He sat there a long while, immovable and silent, with big glistening teardrops running unheeded down his sun-browned cheeks. Finally, he raised his eyes to mine, and I saw they were smoldering, not with sadness, but with anger.

"This I cannot believe!" he said. "This I shall not believe. This I never thought of!"

I stared at him.

"This great China! This 400,000,000 people!" he cried, bringing his fist down on the table. "They cannot be beaten!"

10

As the day wore on, our position grew acute. The actions taken by the tank commander and by Lung Mu-an, commander of the Eighty-eighth Division, had no effect on the battle; in fact, they made our situation worse. The tank commander, having deployed his tanks, had left them in charge of a subordinate, with orders not to start anything until he gave the final word. Overzealous and taking things in his own hands, the subordinate attacked without waiting for an order, and promptly he lost nine tanks. He had escaped from the Japanese but had been arrested by the Chinese and placed under guard. Cursed and reviled by his superiors, who knew

that China could ill afford to lose a single tank, and evidently in despair, the subordinate later seized a revolver from his guard and put a bullet through his head. General Lung Mu-an, as far as I ever learned, never did attack, and he was later executed. So we were still surrounded by the Japanese and in a weaker position than before.

Toward dusk, an artillery cross-fire, smashing down on us from north and south, set the fields on fire in a narrow circle around us. We were boxed in and there was no place to run. With their axes the soldiers felled trees, then hollowed out the ground beneath them and crawled under for protection. All the while, the Japanese balloon rode overhead, watching every move we made. As night fell, the Japanese rushed our Sixty-first Division on the south and drove it back within a mile of army headquarters. The circle now was very tight and close.

We hung on and hoped that help would come. But with our telephone lines severed, our radios out of order and silent, and cut off from Chiang Kai-shek's headquarters in Chengchow, we could see no help in sight. We thought that we were rats in a cage. Our motorized artillery was short of gasoline; our tanks had fuel enough for only a few miles; our army food had been exhausted; the peasant's stocks were almost gone; and the water wells were drying up.

We sensed that we could not stay where we were much longer. We should have to move. The adjutants had packed all the documents, rolled up the bedding of the higher officers and hired peasants to act as porters, so that we could leave at a moment's notice. But still the order for evacuation did not come.

Under these special circumstances there was naught to do but wait. As the hours passed, the tension mounted. The storming of the shells had ceased, and that made the waiting worse; for now instead of hiding from the shells we must hide from our own thoughts. Where was Doihara? What diabolic plan was he brewing now? The officers did not give tongue to these thoughts, but their faces betrayed what their mouths did not say. They were worried, and their worry sent an unpleasant electric tingle through the walls of the mud houses. It got on my nerves and made my body ache. The general must have sensed it, too; for late at night he gruffly told everyone but his chief of staff to clear the room.

Disconsolate and alone I wandered among the huts. Once more

a feeling of utter desolation had me in its grip. What was I, an alien, doing in this poor, medieval Chinese world? How came I here with this beaten army, stumbling blindly across the continent, rushing out of one trap into another?

I came upon a room filled with straw like a stable. Amid a pile of stinking bodies, I gratefully dropped down, wanting very much to sleep. As I bedded down, a figure rose on one elbow, peered intently in the dark at me and then hoarsely whispered.

"Mr. Pai,"—I recognized the voice of a young student officer—"if you were all alone in the fields and met the Japanese, what would you do?"

"Oh, sweet goddam!" I thought.

Aloud, I said: "I'd run. And if I couldn't run, I'd wave a white flag to beat the band."

There now; that ought to keep him. And would he let me sleep? His hand pawed at me in the dark.

"Mr. Pai."

Ah, you wretch.

"Yes."

"You know what I would do?"

All right, goddamit, get it off your chest. "What would you do?"

"I'd shoot every Japanese I saw and"—he paused—God, these Chinese all were actors—"I'd save the last bullet for myself."

I remained motionless, hoping he would cease talking. But his voice kept whispering on, in a tense, hoarse tone.

"They'll never take me alive," he said right in my ear.

I did not stir a muscle but breathed deeply, feigning sleep. I heard him say it once more: "They'll never take me alive." Then exhausted by the strange events of the day, I finally fell asleep.

II

CRACK!

What was that? It had bounded against the walls and shaken the ceiling. Sharp, like a rifle crack. But loud. . . . So loud, as if—someone had fired a shot right in this room.

I opened my eyes.

Smoke poured in them. Weeping, I could see nothing.

Bodies were turning restlessly. Voices were cursing.

"The mother of him who fired that gun!" In the gloom the soldiers swore fiercely. "Son of a turtle!" Then they rolled over and tried to sleep again.

"Ooo—oo."

Ai ya, what was that? From where had that groan come, alive with pain? "Ow—ahh!" There it was again. My blood froze. Was someone being killed in here?

I opened my eyes again.

The smoke had cleared away. Soldiers were stumbling about in the dark and calling loudly for lights. Someone brought a candle. On the straw we saw the student officer writhing in pain. Blood was dripping from his foot. His revolver was by his side. So he'd shot himself. But why now? Why in the foot? Why not in the head? "Get the doctor," called somebody.

A brilliant glare suddenly lit up every corner of the room. A staff officer stood in the door with a torch in his hand. "Everyone get out on the path," he said. The order to retreat had come.

I went to the door. The officer handed me a folded slip of paper. "Look at this and burn it."

Under a candle, I opened the paper and examined it. On it were written the two characters, "*Shih Chiu*." That and nothing more.

"Nineteen." What could that number mean? I juggled the characters back and forth in my mind trying to extract some hidden answer from them. Then I got it. Of course, this was the password. How stupid of me!

I looked at the student officer. The doctor was cutting his sock off, exposing to view a mangled, bloody foot.

"Why did you do it?" said the doctor.

"It was an accident."

"Hmmm."

"Will you send me to the rear now or—can I still fight?"

"No, you can't fight." The doctor paused, then, looking straight at the student, spoke slowly. "I'm leaving you here."

A wild panic flared in the student's eyes.

"Leaving me—here?" His voice expressed disbelief.

"Yes. We are retreating; we can't take you with us. When we break through, we'll send back for you."

A low groan issued from the boy's lips.

"You picked a poor time to shoot yourself," said the doctor.

I started to go. The student called after me.

"Mr. Pai." I turned. "That white flag. . . ."

"Oh, I won't wave it," I said, annoyed. He smiled, but I saw there were tears in his eyes.

Out on the path the doctor flew into a rage. "That man ought to be shot," he said.

"He's already shot," I said.

"I mean he ought to be executed," the doctor said. "The turtle! Now I'll have to leave most of my medicine behind in order to carry him."

"Then you're not going to . . ."

"No," said the doctor, "I'm not going to leave him behind. But his mother!" he swore vehemently. "I ought to. Yes, I ought to."

General Kwei's room was crowded. A candle threw dim, dancing shadows on the mud wall. "It's this way," he said to me. "The enemy is coming back east. Tomorrow it will be too late to get out. Our heavy guns can't then be withdrawn. Our ammunition is gone. Another day and we can't even fire."

He turned to Tsai, the chief of staff, as if seeking confirmation. "If it weren't for the big guns, we could stay here. But we can't lose those guns. It's impossible to get others. Even money couldn't buy them. I must save China's guns."

The tank commander was solicitous. "Mr. Pai, don't be afraid. Be calm. For six kilometers south there is no enemy. Another five kilometers and we shall meet them. We shall break through them."

"We'll break through," said General Kwei. "We must break through. The tanks lead the way. We follow."

With a stick he poked under the bed, dragged out documents and orders and bits of paper and burned them on the floor. The division commanders stood around him in a subdued manner, looking gloomily at the little fire.

I shivered.

One by one the various units formed on the path outside headquarters and departed from Lilo. Dispersed for the sake of speed and safety in retreat, they were to make for the town of Yangku by different routes. Once there, the whole force would join together and try to break through the Japanese. Now everyone had gone but the baggage carriers. They were in charge of the adjutant-general

and brought up the rear. A platoon of soldiers was the only armed guard.

Now we formed up. A confused stir and the sound of muttering voices disturbed the quiet of the village. The tin record boxes of the army clanked as the peasant porters swung their poles. Men cursed and pushed their way into line. A mule brayed loudly.

At last a voice called: "Is everybody ready?"

"Yes," answered several voices at once.

We were off. A peasant guide led the way. He set a fast pace. Silently, we followed. The night was dark and starlit; the path looked white where the sand was thick and blotted out all grass. We made no sound. Only the sand hissed underfoot, the men panted and the baggage every now and then clinked. Otherwise, we were silent. Our ears were pricked up for the slightest noise outside our column. With minds alerted to the danger of the enemy, we trotted along, feeling happy, after the long wait, to get the chance to relieve our taut nerves with action. It was good to be on the march. We only worried, since we were in the rear, lest the enemy come up behind us.

The sand was thick and tired us out. But everyone moved fast. It was like a race: the faster one man moved, the faster did the man behind go. Soon one man moved out to the side of the column, trying to sprint to the front. All immediately followed, seeking to keep up. Nobody wished to be left behind.

Meanwhile, the moon rose and bathed the countryside in a soft and pale light. In its diffused rays we could make out quite clearly scrub bushes, thorns and here and there dark massed trees. We were now a somewhat ghostly company. The faces of the men, in the slanting light from above, looked green and wan. They wore tight, fixed smiles and went faster than ever; for now they knew that they were silhouetted on the flat plain and made perfect targets for rifle or machine-gun fire.

Suddenly, the adjutant at the head of the column thrust a warning hand into the air, signaling us to halt. At the same time he cried in a tense whisper: "Listen!" In confusion the column jolted to a halt. There were a deep murmur and a restless stir in the crowd. The soldiers raised their rifles and looked at one another with an air of bewildered surmise. Then everyone grew still and all strained forward, listening. What could it mean?

The adjutants and the two farmers who were guiding us held a

hurried consultation on the road. They moved a little bit apart from the column and I sidled up close so I could hear what was taking place.

"They may be up there," the adjutant was saying in a stage whisper to the two peasants. "We have to get west. Find us a way."

It seemed to me as if a Japanese were hiding under every bush, and I looked to see in what direction I should run, if suddenly they would appear.

"THE FARMERS ARE TRAITORS!"

I jumped. A voice had just hissed that sentence in my ear.

"THEY ARE LEADING US TO THE JAPANESE."

I jerked around. A soldier was standing beside me, pouring his thoughts into my ear.

At that moment, there was, behind us on the road, a slight commotion. A hoarse voice said: "THEY'VE COME!" Simultaneously, a tiny squeal cut the air. And suddenly, the peasants dropped their carrying poles and baggage to the road and began to run, plunging across the fields like frightened horses.

A soldier quickly raised his rifle to his shoulder and, after taking careful aim, he said coldly:

"Come back here or I'll kill you."

Like puppets on a string, the peasants jerked to a standstill, and without a word shuffled back to the road and once more picked up their carrying poles and baggage.

Meanwhile, the crowd continued to wait impatiently the outcome of the conference between the adjutant and the farmers. Though no enemy was expected so soon, we might have taken, or been guided on, the wrong road; and the whole column save for one or two indifferent peasants peered across the fields in all directions.

From time to time several soldiers would jerk sharply at some slight noise and whirl around with their rifles cocked at bushes in the fields. Others would lie down on the road with their rifles trained in various directions and would confer intimately with their companions, muttering their views on the situation in low undertones.

All at once, someone in the column noticed something and pointed toward it. A murmur ran through the group and all eyes were turned searchingly to the left, where the fields were darkest. There, through a grove of trees, quite far away, an indistinct dot of light could be seen moving.

Before long the dot increased to a ball, and suddenly a great, long shaft of white light burst through the trees, dancing uncertainly up and down across the sands. At this the whole column drew in its breath.

Rapidly, the volume of light increased. Accompanying it came a humming sound, at first faint and then louder like a muffled roar.

The men gazed at the light with scared but fascinated expressions. An electric tingle ran through the crowd, communicating itself from one man to the next. The tension was tremendous.

Suddenly, a voice shouted, snapping the tension.

"That's the general's car," a soldier cried.

Once more the column gasped, but this time it let out its breath in a sharp gush of relief. Other voices, eager and happy, at once took up the cry: "The general's car! That's the general's car."

Except for the lulled roaring sound we had heard, there was not the slightest indication that the light belonged to a car, much less to General Kwei's car. I shouted, not very loudly, but loudly enough: "That might be the Japanese." But I did not repeat my cry; for I was afraid of being thought a nervous fool. Besides, no one cared to listen. All were convinced of what they wished to be convinced. A few moments before, thrown into a state of ghostly uncertainty, they were now being offered a tangible goal toward which they could strive. They clutched at the light as drowning men clutch at straws.

Everyone now broke column and poured helter-skelter across the fields and bushes, panting, chattering and giggling with joy as they raced toward the moving light.

As they ran away to the left across the fields, I stared after them in astonished bewilderment, not wanting to rush after them into a possible ambush but not daring to remain behind alone. No one paid any attention to me at all, and at last I followed after the crowd, keeping everyone in sight, but trotting slowly and remaining a good distance behind.

Suddenly, the light went out, plunging the fields ahead in darkness save for the wan illumination provided by the moon which was now half covered by a cloud. Several small spurts of flame like struck matches flashed close above the ground. Still trotting forward, I watched them with a curious sense of detachment. Then the cool air crackled sharply like a whip and several unseen missiles whizzed by, some of them snapping angrily like a string of small

firecrackers. I halted abruptly. For several seconds I stood stock-still, enchanted by the thought: "So I was right." For a full half-minute I was benumbed. I saw a dim crowd of figures rushing off to the right, in just the opposite direction which they had been taking. I thought: "What are they running for? Where are they going?" As I stood there, I became aware of a buzzing, hissing sound in the air; then I heard a howl, like a wolf's, far off and remote, and then, suddenly, from near at hand, a chill, agonizing scream swooped across the flats.

Seized with a momentary panic, I stood rooted to the ground, trembling. A chill ran up my spine. I broke out in goose flesh. Then, stumbling blindly, I fled.

What remained of the column was driving headlong across the sands to the right, now casting wild looks behind them, now darting in and out among bushes, now staggering and falling in the sands and getting up and going on again. Possessed by pure, unmixed feeling of fear, I ran with all the rest. The faster I ran, the more afraid I was; and the more afraid I was, the faster I ran. Leaping over bushes, I picked my way lightly through the fleeing crowd. I wanted to look over my shoulder, but I was horror-stricken at the thought of what I might see there. My feet growing heavier, I had to slow down. Then I looked behind. I could see nothing. "There's some mistake," I thought. "The Japanese couldn't be here. That must have been one of our own groups." Just then little jets of flame spurted in the darkness behind us again, and once more I started running forward. At last, I could run no further. I slowed down to a walk. Other figures had done the same, all of them panting hard for breath.

We had not the slightest idea where we were. It seemed an inappropriate time to lose the way. Ahead of us was a slight rise of ground which we plowed over with leaden feet. At the top we saw we were on a dirt road. It was crowded with Chinese soldiers. By luck we had stumbled into our main retreating columns.

After the blind wilderness of flight, the road, as we came upon it, seemed warm and friendly with protective company. But it was a narrow road, and there was nothing but pure nightmare on it. From one end to the other the road provided an astounding but profoundly irritating spectacle. Figures were swarming out of the fields from every direction to swell the tide of the retreating army. They made an extraordinary conglomeration—a composite of sol-

diers, animals and outworn military accouterments that could have been found nowhere else save in a retreating Chinese Army such as this. There were a few big Krupp-made guns, pulled by motor trucks, mountain guns packed on long-eared mules and bird rifles from the nineteenth century. There were fragile Vickers tanks, and high-wheeled carts loaded with bric-a-brac and squeaking noisily in the night. There were high-back mules and low-back gaily caparisoned donkeys and small, fleet Mongolian ponies. There were dull, brutish peasants, bent low under loads as heavy as those any beast of burden carried. There were soldiers in tattered, stained rags, with bare feet or feet in rope sandals, with caps or rags about their heads and only one or two with helmets. There were Honanese and Cantonese and Szechuanese, Shanghailanders and Peipingites, each speaking to his brother in a different village tongue. All of these poured through clouds of dust down the road, swinging their rifles and baggage loads violently, striking one another in the face, batting against a donkey's rump, chattering, gesticulating and swearing, their interests all united now in common flight, but their actions at cross-purposes, with porter snarled with soldier and soldier snarled with donkey and donkey snarled with guns—an indescribable, tangled, nighttime mess.

In this web of heaving, pressing soldiers, an old-fashioned artillery staff car, long and high, off-the-ground, with seats for more than twenty men, had stalled. I jumped on the side to get a ride.

"I beg your pardon, comrade," said a voice, "but you can't ride here."

After all the uproar and confusion of the night, to be told this sent me into a fury. "I'm from headquarters. I'm going to ride." They let me in.

The road was so obstructed with soldiers, wagons and donkeys that it was impossible to get by in a car. A guard jumped from the car and ran ahead, shouting: "Keep to the left; keep to the left." The fellow beside the driver cried down to the soldiers on the road: "Beg your pardon. Excuse us please. Keep to the side of the road." But an officer beside me roared: "Get to one side! This is an official car."

"You have to speak in a loud voice," he explained, "or they won't pay attention."

His remark aroused in me a sympathy for the soldiers, a sympathy that shriveled up my fear and irritation, making it seem small and

petty. What did I, a privileged foreign guest, know about the pains and labors of such men as these? Born to tenant, feudal slavery, to an overworked and crowded plot of ground, stunned into obedience as children beneath the grasping landlord's hand, seized at the age of fifteen or sixteen from their peaceful country haunts and thrown half armed into a world of savage violence, they had had the war's brutality branded into their young, enslaved flesh, distilled through all their awkward peasant joints and dug like deep scars into their brains, hearts and souls. Oh, I was with them, for them, and though I was not of them—never could an alien-tongued foreigner be of them—yet more than once they had been brother to my misery. That long, bloodied time ago in that mad, anarchic retreat across the north China plain, when He had broken his last crumbs of bread with me, a foreign devil, who then spoke scarce a dozen words of Chinese; that different but same He, who had found opium for my raging, dysenteric stomach on that wild and tumbled rout through Shansi Province; and all those He's who, in the bitter, barren, snow-cold mountains, had warmed my body with their bodies and with a torn and ragged overcoat, property not of one man but of six! Yes, it was these "dumb, illiterate beasts" on whom our safety depended and on them alone.

They trotted there now beside us under the dimming light of the moon, heads down, eyes seemingly closed, wagging from side to side as if they were only half awake. And well they might have been; for they had been fighting six long days without sleep.

Our car edged slowly forward, drew up in line behind our big guns and then stopped. We were before the walls of Yangku. Beyond lay the Japanese.

The gates of Yangku were shut and bolted. We banged and cried, beating our hands against the thick wooden gates and hollering up at the stone walls, but the people on the other side would not open up.

"They are afraid of offending the Japanese," said a voice.

"It's the gentry," said a soldier. "The blood-eating gentry. We ought to shoot the traitors."

I laughed. I could not help it. The universal irritation no longer seemed annoying; it seemed good. The soldiers swore darkly. They cursed the ancestors of all the people of this part of Honan, tracing their lineage back to the time of the Three Kingdoms and beyond, painting the grandfathers and the great-great-grandfathers of the

people of Yangku with corrupt and lurid tongues. Their swearing was an expert, professional thing of beauty. And it was good, so very, very good, that I laughed with the joy of it. And when they heard me laughing, they gasped and giggled nervously and then they started laughing, too. It was a spontaneous, booming, bellowing kind of a laugh that exploded out of them and bounded and reverberated under the city walls. It swelled and mounted and rose, ungovernable, corrupting the stillness of the night and causing men to hiss at us to be quiet, but we could not control ourselves. At length, when we were subsiding into faint wheezes, an officer clapped his hand on my shoulder and said:

"Mr. Pai—haw-haw-haw—this China—this country—haw-haw-haw—have you ever seen such a strange country? Do they have such a country as this in America?"

"No," I said, "America has no such country as this. The whole world has no such, goddam, mad, lovable country as this."

That set them off into gales of laughter again. And one of them poked me in the ribs: "Haw-haw-haw, you're a Chinese, Mr. Pai—haw-haw-haw—you're mad like the rest of us."

Abruptly, the crack of rifles cut across our laughter. Twenty—thirty—forty shots rang through the blackness.

We sprang from the road into the fields. The whole line fanned out away from the parked guns and vehicles.

Out of the blackness rang a voice, clear and strong.

"Don't move! Don't move!"

Other voices took up the cry. "Don't move!"

In obedience, the fugitive figures paused. Then we all lay flat on the grass, clinging to the cold ground.

Nothing further happened and we calmed down. In a little while trucks arrived and drew to the side of the road. Then foot soldiers passed by, moving warily forward.

"They will break through and we will follow," said an artillery officer. We were now at the end of the line.

In a moment, General Kwei's car drove up. I heard someone say: "General, you can't get by. Trenches are dug outside the north gate."

"Go on!" said the general, and his car went forward.

It grew light. We put the cars under trees to conceal them from the planes. We saw a hole in the city wall; the gate was open. We walked in.

A staff officer trotting down the street cried out: "Good news! Mr. Pai. Good news! The enemy have all retreated."

Only half believing this curious news I went on into the town, searching for the general. I found him in a dark room, kneeling on a stone floor, peering at a map by the light of a candle.

The tank commander looked up at me and grinned. "The enemy have gone back to the Yellow River. They have no ammunition. Doihara has been defeated this time."

General Kwei said: "I knew I should have attacked westward. The enemy would have been badly defeated then. Oh, this is too bad."

Abruptly, he turned to me and said: "You were there when I said we should have attacked westward, weren't you? You heard me say so, didn't you? Sonofabitch, we would have had a big victory then."

The chief of staff with a sardonic smile on his face said: "Have you ever seen anything like this before? Two armies retreating at once?"

13

The general and I went into the countryside to set up a headquarters. The villages were deserted and ghostly. Many of the houses were burned down. A stomach-turning odor fouled the air. A feeling of nausea crept over me. I didn't know what it was.

The general called to me from the inside of a half-burnt house. As I approached, an overpowering stench made me clutch my nose and swallow hard to keep from vomiting. Silently, the general pointed into a room. My eyes followed his pointing finger to a spot on the ground in the center of the room. At first I saw only a vague black lump. Then I made out a broken, half-burnt bed and the charred bodies of a man and woman. Their flesh was black and corrupt. With my hair rising, I crept on tiptoe inside the room. The man's body had no head. I saw it over against a mud wall—a pulpy mass, sightless, with the lips stretched in a tight grimace. I stared at it, fascinated by a nameless dread. Sweat dripped out of every pore in my body; then I grew cold and trembled in every limb. From somewhere far off, I heard the general calling: "Mr. Pai, Mr. Pai"; and I ran from the room.

Anxious for another's company, I flew across the passage toward the sound of his voice and burst through an open door. Then I froze stiff with horror at what I saw.

A naked girl lay upon a *kang*. Her legs were spread apart and her ankles were tied with reed ropes to the bottom of the kang. She was lying on her back, but her body was slightly twisted to one side at the hips. Two gashes ran across her stomach like dark-brown welts. Over one side of her body from her breasts to her thighs ran a thick, sticky dark-red mass in which flies were already walking. Her arms lay thrown to either side of her, back and upward, as if in the last moment she had given up warding off the blows of the bayonet and had desired only death. Her ugly face was bashed in, but the mouth had frozen wide open, and it seemed she might have been screaming before she lost consciousness.

The general and I stared at each other. He was ghastly pale and I suppose I was, too. He was the first to speak.

"You see?"

"Yes, I see."

Having spoken once, I could not speak again. I could not move but kept staring fixedly at the mutilated form on the bed, scared by what I saw there. A terrible odor rose to my nose and stifled me. My heart throbbed violently. I gasped for breath. I was gripped by an indescribable feeling of claustrophobia. I fancied the walls were closing in on me. I had never had this feeling before. The roots of it were much more sinister and deep and evil than anything I had ever felt. For the first time I had come on something full of horror. I had never felt this on the battlefield. A field of battle is gruesome, awful and terrible, but it is not horrible. Here not only was something out of all my experience, foul, vile and unclean, but also there was a nameless dread in the air as if a horrid monster were prowling around inside the house. In spite of myself a great shiver ran down between my shoulders. The sight of the girl, tied to that bed, in the middle of this half-burnt house, was frightful. The silence was profound and terrifying. I held my breath, my heart beating wildly. Then I let it out of me in a painful gasp. Suddenly, I started with surprise. The general did, too. We had heard a noise. There it was again—a long, drawn-out sigh, followed by a low moan. I felt my skin puckering up and all the hairs on my body stiffening. We listened; for a few moments we heard nothing which almost drove us out of our senses; then we heard a low moan again and a scraping, creaking sound. We jerked around. Involuntarily, I screamed. The door was closing. We both rushed at it, thrust aside a partially emplaced door leaf and ran outside. An old woman was hobbling

away around the corner of the house. We ran after her and grabbed her by the shoulders. She turned a twitching, frightened face toward us.

The general spoke to her gently. "How is it you're here, old wife?"

For a minute the woman surveyed us cunningly, nodding her head up and down. She seemed satisfied by what she saw; for she broke into a toothy grin, then started to speak in a weary monotone.

Pointing to a pile of blackened ashes on the ground, she said: "They made us bring everything we had into this courtyard. What they wanted they seized; what they didn't want they threw in a heap and burned with gasoline. I guess you were looking at old Li's daughter. Well, after that, everyone ran away and hid in the fields but old Wang and I. He was lame and I was too old. They didn't bother me." She paused a moment, casting her weak eyes around the village, and finally pointed to a group of burned and still-smoking houses. "Old Wang was in his house when they set fire to those houses there. He looked out to see what was going on and they threw him on the fire, also."

She told her story in an unexcited, hopeless fashion. During her recital, we had noticed stealthy figures, darting from behind one house to another. Now they began peering around the corners of the houses at us, and soon they came toward us, stealthily at first and then more boldly.

The peasants, who had been hiding in the fields for four days, had at last come home.

Shortly afterwards, we departed to renew our attack against Doihara.

14

There are few more wild and crazy battles than the one the Chinese waged against Doihara along the southern banks of the Yellow River in 1938. First, because of a Chinese division commander's carelessness, Doihara crosses the river, and the division commander commits suicide. Next, he arrogantly moves south, throws the Lunghai Railway into an uproar and surrounds the Twenty-seventh Army of General Kwei Yung-ching. In the midst of this battle, he suddenly runs short of supplies and runs back to the Yellow River. Overnight he changes from the role of pursuer to that of fugitive.

Given the greatest opportunity of the war, the Chinese immediately moved against their hated enemy. With a swift thrust they pushed Doihara to the banks of the Yellow River, closed about him and finally besieged him in three small towns. The Japanese Lawrence of Manchuria was in a perilous position. He had his back to the river and in front of him and on both sides were no less than fourteen Chinese divisions. General Hsieh Yu, the Chinese commander in chief, ordered a general attack.

At this time, the Japanese Sixteenth Division was moving eastward from captured Hsuechow, south of the Lunghai Railway, in the direction of Lanfeng, and coming up fast. They knew the predicament Doihara was in and they realized that unless they arrived promptly, Doihara would be wiped out. The Chinese were not worried about this force; they expected their Eighth Army to make a determined stand at Kweitch on the Lunghai and give them time to clean up Doihara. The Eighth Army, however, failed dismally in its task, retiring after a two-hour engagement. This was bad enough, but it was not fatal. One day's delay at Kweitch would have given time to finish the action against Doihara, but there was still enough Chinese strength available there to allow Hsieh Yu to detach a force against the new threat.

Hearing of the Eighth Army's fiasco, General Hsieh promptly sent Kwei Yung-ching with five divisions to oppose the Japanese advancing on the town of Suhsien, south of the Lunghai Railway. With the remaining nine divisions he continued the attack against Doihara.

By great good fortune, Kwei actually reached Suhsien ahead of the Japanese and formed a defense line north and south through the area. Any kind of a fight here would cause enough delay to finish off Doihara.

At this critical moment, Chiang Kai-shek, for some unknown reason, ordered a general retreat. This was one of the strangest, if not the worst, decisions in the China War. The effect on Chinese morale of wiping out a Japanese division, and Doihara's above all others, would have been tremendous. Hsieh Yu's troops could then have moved to back up Kwei Yung-ching and the whole character of the operation, if not the war, might have changed.

As ordered by Chiang Kai-shek, the Suhsien line was abandoned and Kwei and the other troops retired to the west. The troops sur-

rounding Doihara then pulled out and a general retreat began across the whole Yellow River plain.

15

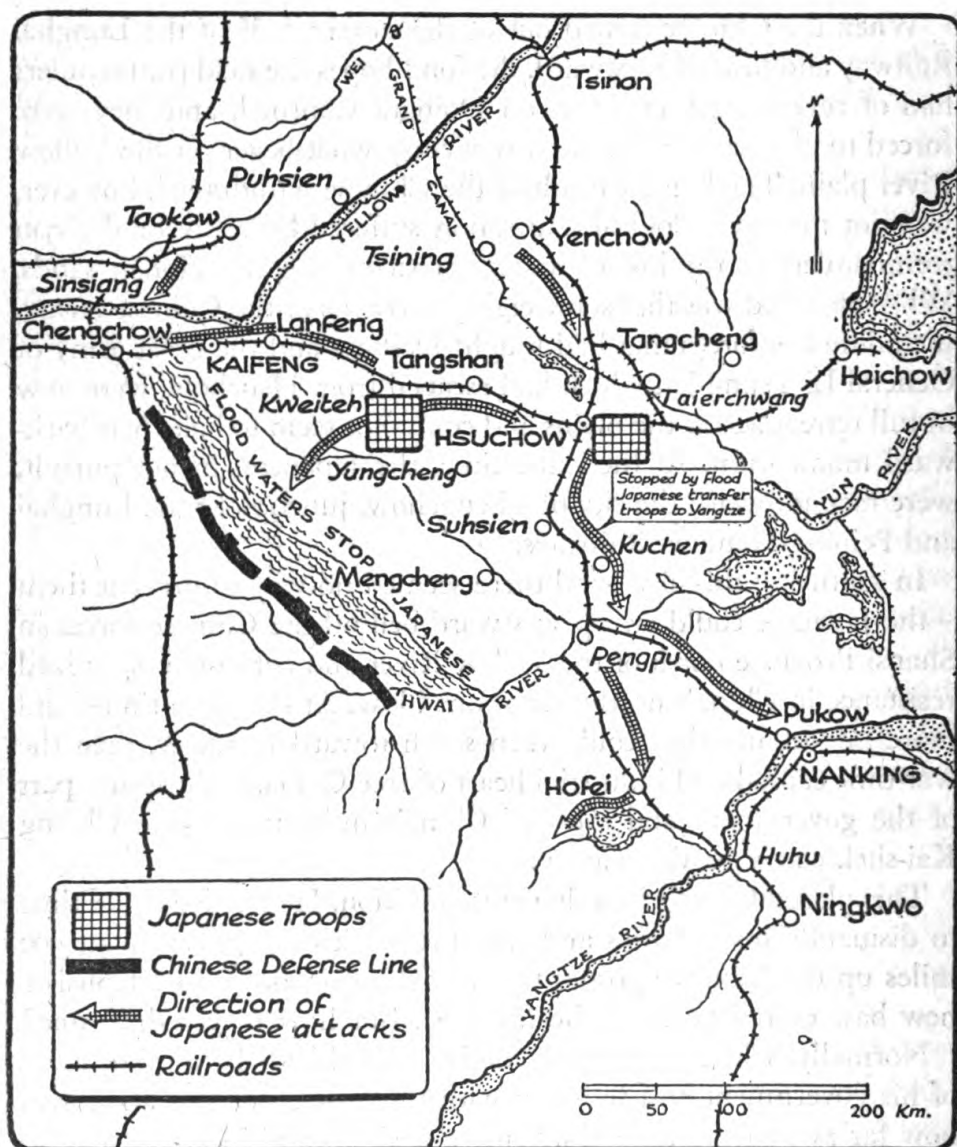
When the Chinese pulled out of the eastern half of the Lunghai Railway and headed westward, the fond hopes the field commanders had of revenging themselves on Doihara vanished, and they were forced to give up any idea of any victory whatsoever on the Yellow River plain. The biggest result of the Chinese withdrawal, however, was not the psychological frustration suffered by army or division commanders or the loss of a solitary victory on the Honan sands. What mattered was that some eighty divisions of the Chinese Army, including the forces that had fought Doihara and the great army of General Li Tsung-jen which had escaped from Hsuehchow, were now in full retreat across the plains and could not seem to halt their backward momentum. At the same time, the Japanese, in hot pursuit, were racing toward the city of Chengchow, junction of the Lunghai and Peiping-Hankow Railways.

In capturing this city—and there seemed no way to prevent them—the Japanese could sweep westward behind the Chinese forces in Shansi Province north of the Yellow River and cut down organized resistance in China's northwest at one blow. At the same time—and more important—they could turn south toward Hankow, then the war-time capital and industrial heart of free China, and capture part of the government and most of China's industries before Chiang Kai-shek could get them away.

This placed Chiang in a desperate position. He needed some time to dismantle his factories and ship them with the government 900 miles up the Yangtze gorges to Chungking in order to establish a new base of resistance in the far west. But how to get that time?

Normally, Chiang Kai-shek might have shielded the movement of his government and industry with the army. But this army was now far away from a good defensive position and in a bad state to stave off the attack on Hankow. It was ragged, worn and discouraged. It was enervated by months of incessant struggle. It had received a shock and been unpleasantly surprised by the sudden turn of events. The officers were psychologically upset. At their continued withdrawal after the "victorious retreat" from Hsuehchow, they wondered in despair. At their failure to catch Doihara they ground their

teeth in vain. At the breakdown of the railways and the failure of supplies to arrive they stood amazed and impotent. Momentarily, they were a beaten army. But more than this, they were retreating



THE BATTLE OF THE YELLOW RIVER

so fast, they could not stop. Nowhere could they form a line. But worst of all, even if they could form a line, no supplies were near at hand at the moment to support them. Under these conditions they could not resist for a long time before Hankow. And a long time

was just what was needed. So, with the army in danger of being dispersed into guerrilla bands, with the government and industry still at Hankow, and with a vast maneuverable plain open to the advancing Japanese, the Republic of China seemed on the verge of disaster. Never since the fall of Nanking had the breath of uncertainty so overhung the future of the War of Resistance.

Because he literally had nowhere to turn, Chiang Kai-shek in the end turned toward China's ancient nurse and protector—to the Yellow River itself.

For some time the Chinese had had a plan to cut the Yellow River dikes and pour a barrier flood of water down before the Japanese. This plan, naturally, was secret, but like all Chinese secrets it had long been noised and rumored about the country. Somehow—perhaps through traitors—the Japanese had received news of this plan in general, but probably not in detail. So partially for this reason they had dispatched Doihara across the Yellow River to prevent the Chinese from opening the dikes. This move undoubtedly had interfered with the Chinese plan but what held the Chinese up most of all was not Doihara but the fact that the water was very low in the river throughout the whole spring of 1938. The river simply could not be made to overflow its banks in accordance with any plan. Perpetually a flood menace, it could not in this crisis be turned into a flood just when needed. Thus this ancient, treacherous stream was itself the chief traitor to China's cause.

After a careful search, the Chinese did find one place where the ground was low enough and suitable for creating a flood that could halt the Japanese. Curiously enough, this spot was at Huayuankou, a small village ten miles north of Chengchow, exactly where the Yellow River had broken its banks and changed its course some seventy or eighty years before. At this village, engineers now planned to duplicate the old natural action of the river by new artificial means.

Chiang Kai-shek ordered General Shang Chen, whom we met before in the beginning of this narrative as the original opponent of Doihara, to take responsibility for blowing up the dikes. Thus General Shang Chen, who had lost the first round of the battle of the Yellow River, when he had the river between himself and Doihara, now, in the last round of the battle, planned to put the river back once more between himself and his foe.

As the Japanese seized the capital of ancient China at Kaifeng and advanced toward Chengchow, Chiang Kai-shek grew extremely nervous and every day called Shang to find out if the dikes had been blown up. And every day he was told they had not been. Why?

General Shang, a suave northerner, who today likes to forget that he was once an opponent of Chiang Kai-shek in the civil wars, would not blow the dikes for the simple reason that the Chinese Army first had to retreat past the flood's planned path. Of course, Shang might have—as some years later the British did in Burma when they blew the Sittang River bridge and cut off their own troops—he might have become excited and blown up the dikes; but he didn't, and he coolly held his hand. Still the pressure on him to burst open the river, and then and there have done with the Japanese threat, must have been tremendous; for the fate of all China at that moment hung on his actions. Yet Shang acted slowly and still he delayed. In doing this he gave the Japanese, who were pressing close behind the Chinese, a chance to intercept his work and ruin Chiang Kai-shek's plan.

Shang's own troops of the Thirty-ninth Army passed out of Chengchow, but he himself stayed there waiting. He busied himself by placing a small force on the dikes and mining the galleries under the earthen works with dynamite.

In the meantime, Doihara advanced to within twelve miles of the city. The people were in a panic, and many fled. As they did so, the Japanese Air Force hurled down a ceaseless rain of bombs on the helpless city, halting all railway traffic and wrecking every main street in town. Promptly, factories, shops, banks and homes closed up. All the moneyed people fled. Some of the poor remained and soon mingled in the ruined streets with the refugees who were pouring by the hundreds into Chengchow from the east and north. Joining hands with straggling soldiers, the misery-ridden horde broke open shops, littering grain about the streets, as they fought for a chance to fill their famished stomachs. All order seemed to be going by the board.

General Shang, if affected by the chaos around him, gave no sign, but still he wouldn't blow the dikes. To the Chinese general staff, waiting with tense and taut nerves in Hankow, this was maddening. Again, why had not the dikes been blown?

As day after day passed and the Japanese advanced almost to the

doors of Chengchow, Chiang Kai-shek became more nervous still. He had gambled everything on the Yellow River flood, and if the dikes were not broken, he, his government and perhaps the whole country might be plunged into swift, irrevocable ruin.

Chiang kept summoning Shang to the telephone. "Is the dike cut yet?" he would ask. And when Shang would say: "No," Chiang would ask: "What is the situation?" When Shang would answer: "Peaceful"—and it must have been a maddening phrase—Chiang would say again: "You must be sure to cut the dike. You mustn't fail."

Chiang's nervousness can be better understood when it is known how often his subordinates had failed him and were to fail him again throughout the long course of the China War. And here all his hopes and the very destiny of China were in this one man's hands. Truly, Chiang could say: "You must not fail."

On May 11, a small force of Japanese suddenly burst into the area through which the Chinese engineers planned to lead the flood. Just ahead of this force, the Chinese Army was retreating. That was the sign that Shang had been waiting for, and he at once ordered the dikes blown up.

That afternoon a breach 200 meters wide was driven into the earthen dike at Huayuankou. The river, seeming to laugh at the engineers puny efforts, and quixotic and independent to the last, continued to flow steadily on its old course. It would not turn south and bend itself to the Chinese plan. It seemed to the fevered watchers standing on the bank as if the river, having a soul of its own, reserved to itself the right to betray the Chinese race, which it had nursed in infancy, into the hands of the new barbarian invaders. The river pounded, swirled and bubbled against the broken dikes with a sound very much like a loud, sardonic, hissing laugh; then, finally with a terrible roar, it turned, and, with a sudden burst of power, ripped through the breach toward the city of Chengchow. Rushing directly south, the new Yellow River seemed bent on some act of final irony, as if it would destroy the men who had created it. Continuing south for a few hundred yards, the flood abruptly turned—just as the engineers had predicted—and swarmed across the low ground, swerving eastward and heading toward the Lunghai Railway.

In the middle of the afternoon, gathering force and fanning out

in several sodden, mucky, yellow columns, the river swarmed down on the Japanese, drowning many soldiers of the advanced guard, miring tanks and guns and throwing an impassable wall of water between the main Japanese Army and Chengchow.

China had been saved.³

³ The New Yellow River today is out of control and cannot find a channel. Continually shifting course, the river creates disasters in Honan, Anhui and Kiangsu Provinces. In some places it is a rushing torrent, narrow, turbulent and muddy, roaring along at a breakneck speed of 18,000 cubic centimeters a second; in other places the river is ten to twenty miles wide. At times it throws up nine-foot waves and there is not a boat in China that can navigate up and down its course. Not one great river, but dozens of treacherous streams, it has spread over eastern China, variously emptying into the Hwai River, the Hunchih Lake, the Yellow Sea, the Grand Canal and the Yangtze River.

In its unpredictable journeyings, the new river has gone on a rampage through eleven counties and three provinces, submerged eleven cities, 4,000 villages, and upwards of 2,000,000 square *mow* of land; it has driven 2,000,000 people from their homes and damaged property to the tune of at least \$2,000,000,000. Finally, the new Yellow River has changed the course of the war. It has broken China irrevocably in half—north and south, occupied and free, Japanese and Chinese.

And last of all, it has given the world a new term, "scorched earth."

BRITISH BATTLEFIELDS

Chapter IV

The Siege of Malta

"However small and weak a state may be in comparison to the enemy, if it foregoes a last supreme effort, we must say that there is no longer any soul left in it."

—VON CLAUSEWITZ

"The tales and descriptions of that time without exception speak only of self-sacrifice, patriotic devotion, despair, grief, and heroism. . . . But it was not really so. It appears so to us because we see only the general historic interest of that time and do not see all the personal human interests that people had. Yet in reality those personal interests of the moment so much transcend the general interests that they always prevent the public interest from being felt or even noticed. Most of the people at that time paid no attention to the general progress of events but were guided only by their private interests."

—TOLSTOY

I

IN THE spring of 1942, the Germans concentrated their aerial strength in Sicily and assaulted the near-by airdromes of Malta. Knocking out the island's fighter protection, they attacked the Grand Harbor and sank a newly arrived convoy. With the biggest harbor objectives destroyed and the supply situation made acute, the Luftwaffe drove against the civilian population and sought to demoralize it. Public services were wrecked, grain stores burst open, communications smashed and the main defense areas of Malta isolated. As a final step in a prepared pattern of aerial offense, the Luftwaffe dove Stukas and fighters directly against the ack-ack and coastal guns protecting the airfields, the harbor and the coastline. After 4,000 bomber sorties against the island in one month, the way for invasion seemed prepared.

Harassed island officers, operating in caverns tunneled out of the medieval stone forts of the Knights of Malta, declared a state of emergency and ordered every combatant to twenty-four hour "action stations." The garrison dug in and made ready to beat off an air or seaborne invasion from Sicily.

That invasion never came. Like the invasion of England, it was never attempted. Just why, probably only the Axis leaders know.

This much is apparent. At the height of the blitz over Malta, Rommel, having seized Tobruk and begun his march toward Alexandria, suddenly transferred the main strength of the Luftwaffe in the Mediterranean from Sicily to Crete. Probably he figured that, with the capture of the eastern Mediterranean, starved Malta would fall as a matter of course into his hands.

For his failure to subdue Malta, Rommel and the Axis paid dearly. Pivoting on this outpost in the center of the Mediterranean, an air force, striking south, west and north against Tripolitania, Tunisia, Sardinia, Sicily and Italy, covered General Eisenhower's invasion of Africa and gave an impetus to General Bernard Law Montgomery's 1,500-mile march out of Egypt, through Cyrenaica and across the desert to Tripoli and Tunisia. After the conquest of Africa, the island, which had long looked toward Europe with a feeling of fright, turned its eyes on the continent in a spirit of hopeful revenge. On July 9, 1943, an Allied naval force of 3,000 ships, sheltering behind and in the island, suddenly drove across the Mediterranean and landed an army on Sicily, for many months the scourge of Malta. Two months later, the Italian fleet sailed into Malta and completed the island's revenge.

2

Alone among the island fortresses of the world, Malta held out under siege. Hongkong fell within three weeks, partially a victim to internal rot and fifth columnism. Corregidor lasted a little longer and capitulated when it ran low on food and ammunition and the Japanese breached its defenses. Only Malta, like Leningrad, held the fort long enough to be relieved and to mount an offensive from the ashes of her ruins.

Probably the siege of Malta was not as bitter as that of Leningrad. Nor were the two sieges the same militarily. Leningrad was beleaguered by land; Malta was besieged entirely by air. The siege of Malta was the first air siege in history.

Properly speaking, the real siege of the island did not begin until 1942. All that had gone before was merely practice.

In the beginning, Italian bombing, though widespread, was inaccurate and ineffective. Invading aircraft were fought largely with anti-aircraft guns.

Italian and British pilots maintained a semichivalrous attitude toward one another. Both air forces dropped cigarettes "over the lines" to captured fellow pilots. When an Italian pilot was shot down into the sea, another Italian airman flew over Malta, dropped a note giving his position and asked the British to pick him up, as Italy had no available ships.

This state of affairs went on for some time. It was misleading. The army, trying to absorb the lessons of Crete, built strong points and carried out anti-invasion exercises, but neither it nor the air force was prepared for an all-out air siege.

Although it was not realized at the time, the groundwork for this siege was laid at the beginning of 1942. Having returned to Sicily and taken over certain airdromes from the Italians, the Luftwaffe systematically began to neutralize Malta's air defense. At first, German fighter patrols engaged the R.A.F. so that it couldn't interfere with Rommel's supply route from Italy to Libya.

Next, the Germans strove for local air superiority over Malta. JU-88 bombers, based on Catania in Sicily, hurled 1,000,000 pounds of bombs on the island during January and February, 1942. A small force of Hurricanes was powerless to meet the mounting scale of attack.

In March, growing more confident, the Germans came in lower than before and raised the general tempo of the assault. On one day the island was under an alert for twenty-one and a half hours out of twenty-four. Throughout the whole month the island was alerted for 371 hours, the equivalent of fifteen days perpetual alert.

In the middle of the month, learning from reconnaissance or spies in Egypt that a convoy was on its way to the island from Alexandria, seventy-five JU-88's assaulted the airdromes with the evident intention of knocking out the R.A.F. fighters preliminary to destroying the convoy. For three days the assault was incessantly continued. The island did not know it at the time, but the German air blitz had begun in earnest.

Somehow, the convoy reached Malta. The people, gloating over newly arrived supplies, were slow in unloading the ships. Given this

opportunity, the Germans hurriedly swarmed out of Sicily. In a terrible series of night and day raids a stupendous rain of heavy bombs hurtled between the cliffs of the Grand Harbor, exploding ceaselessly about the still unloaded convoy. Within seventy-two hours the whole convoy was wrecked or at the bottom of the harbor. The Maltese, standing in comparative safety on the cliff, seeing their ships being blown apart before their eyes, and precious supplies going to the bottom, were learning at first hand the grim lesson that a convoy was not successful because it had reached Malta. It had to be unloaded and stores dispersed first; rejoicing could come later.

From now on Malta lived constantly underground. An average of 175 bombers swept over the island every day. Normally, there was a heavy raid for breakfast, lunch and tea. On one record-making day there were seventeen alerts. On April 7 alone, 1,000,000 pounds of bombs were dropped by invading planes. On April 14, an alarm sent Malta scurrying underground at half-past six o'clock in the morning. Huddled into more than 1,000 rock shelters providing an average underground of four square feet per person, the people remained until eight o'clock that night. They had been through the longest single alert of the war—thirteen hours and sixteen minutes.

Malta had been used to raids, but nothing like this. Somehow the people learned to keep working during ordinary alerts. Ignoring the ordinary warning sirens, dockyard workers posted their sons and daughters at advantageous spots to watch for the red flag that announced that bombers were near the island. Just before JU-88's and -87's roared in over Malta, the children would yell: "Danger, danger," and everyone would run to shelters.

The *Times* of Malta, only English-language newspaper on the island to keep running, also had a warning system of its own. Having found it impossible to get the paper out if the staff went underground every time there was an alert, Mabel Strickland, lantern-jawed editress of the *Times*, trained two Maltese boys to act as night roof spotters. Watching the island's searchlights to see where the planes were heading, the spotters would telephone a warning to the staff working below only when the planes were heading directly for the *Times* area. Then they would skurry down from the roof and join the rest of the staff in a dried-up well beneath the building.

One of the biggest trials during the blitz was getting around the island. All ferries, buses and *degghaises* (Maltese type of gondola) ceased running during the alarm. People who had sense stopped, too.

Generally starting for their offices at eight o'clock, they arrived at eleven—just in time for another raid. With armfuls of papers, typewriters, codes and files they tumbled 150 steps down into the damp, dripping earth. When they went up to seek food, they were met by a lunch-time alarm. At the end of the day on their way home, they ran into the supper raid. Arriving home at nine, they would be just in time for the evening raid. If you were married, you had a meal of sorts waiting for you. "Our women were wonderful," say the Maltese. "Christ knows how they had the meal ready but they did."

Children were a menace during the blitz. It was difficult to get them to go underground. They used to chase shot-down pilots, parachuting from falling planes, or they would stand out in the open, staring at a deadly German fighter zooming overhead. One kid would say to the other. "That's a Messerschmitt 109"; and the other would answer: "No, it's a 110."

During the blitz all social life ceased. It never occurred to anyone to ask a guest for dinner. The invitation would have been refused in any event. The main idea was to get home before the evening raid. Then most people were so tired they stayed in bed during the night raids.

Life centered around sleeping and eating. After the blitz, social functions never returned to normal. Most places of amusement, most of the town homes had been destroyed.

In Valletta, a city of palaces and churches where architecture is considered more perfectly harmonious than anywhere else in Europe, 75 per cent of the houses were knocked down. People coming out of the shelters after the raid and looking at the ruins used to get the creeps and one man would say to another: "Christamighty! Look at the cinema."

Amid all the destruction, the people of Malta learned, however, to take their own personal losses with an angry fatalism. A common saying during the blitz was, "I came naked into the world and I'll go out that way."

Toward the end of April it seemed as if this prophecy might literally be fulfilled. During the month, over 4,000 bombers raided the island. Thousands of homes were destroyed, 1,500,000 tons of debris were estimated to be piled up in the small towns of Valletta and Floriana alone.

Day by day the intensity of the blitz grew. A call for help was sent to London and reinforcements of Spitfires were flown into the

island. Immediately detecting the arrival of this new threat, the Germans challenged it. Three hundred bombers attacked the air fields before the new British force could get settled. The Spitfires fought back gallantly enough but frequently they had to come down to re-fuel. Once on the ground, they were an easy target for the waves of German bombers that were shuttling back and forth from Sicily. The R.A.F. was soon driven from the air and destroyed on the ground.

The Germans now had complete control of the air over Malta. The defenders fell back on army ack-ack gunners. In one seventy-two-hour period the Maltese and British gunners stood behind their guns for sixty-eight hours. The sky was so thick with planes that they could not feed guns fast enough with ammunition. Wives of Maltese dockyard workers formed lines and passed shells up to the gunners. These were used up so fast and reserves were running so low that each gun had to be restricted to firing a limited number of rounds a day. All antiaircraft barrages for the time being were forbidden. Yet during April the gunners of Malta shot down 102 certain planes over the island.

But this heroic resistance could not go on forever. Messerschmitts were soon loosed low against the gunners. Facing no fighter opposition, the Germans ground-strafted airdromes, then army camps, and finally dueled with the gunners themselves. Lewis guns were mounted in camp areas and fed with armor-piercing bullets. It was felt that by giving the infantrymen a chance to strike back their morale would be raised.

Morale was raised, but in late April and early May more than morale was needed. Bombs were digging up communication lines buried three feet beneath the ground, grain stores were scattered, roads were filled with debris, and town by town the areas were becoming isolated. This situation could not be endured much longer. Another attempt was made to bring in Spitfires. By this time further preparations had been made to receive them. Soldiers had filled bomb craters, built over twenty-five miles of dispersal strips and erected protection pens out of gasoline tins filled with sand. Then they prepared to act as ground crews for the air force. The R.A.F. could bring fighter planes into Malta, but no extra personnel, so the army infantrymen on the island had temporarily to join the air force.

On May 9, 1942, forty-five Spitfires from England landed on

Malta. This time the infantry ground crews had planes refueled and into combat within twenty minutes of their arrival. From that day on, low-flying Messerschmitts disappeared from the skies over the island.

On May 10, the most decisive battle in Malta's history was fought over the island and the near-by sea. A convoy bringing Bofors ammunition for antiaircraft guns had arrived in the harbor and sixty German bombers flew in to attack it. The army laid down a smoke-screen and the officers lifted the restriction on the use of ammunition to save the convoy. What Axis planes survived what has been called the most concentrated ack-ack fire ever known were slaughtered by the newly arrived Spits. Nearly fifty enemy planes were brought down into the sea or on the island while 5,000 Maltese lined the shores and howled at the downed enemy airmen.

This battle, coupled with another one a week later, and the transference of the main strength of the Luftwaffe to Crete ended the blitz over Malta.

During the spring and winter blitz the Axis loosed well over 20,000,000 pounds of bombs on the island. The material damage was terrific but casualties were remarkably low. Throughout two and a half years of bombing, the Axis lost as many air crewmen as there were total casualties in killed and wounded on the island.

In these light casualties are hidden some of the reasons for Malta's survival. That the island should have survived the most concentrated aerial bombardment then known was somewhat miraculous. Garrison officers say today that Malta was saved by three things:

1. It didn't catch fire. (If towns had been built of wood, the garrison would have been forced to surrender.)
2. The rocky nature of the island provided ready-to-hand material for building shelters for most of the population.
3. The Maltese were equipped to put up with discomforts better than the average Westerner. (If there had been a considerable civilian movement for peace, the garrison would have had to capitulate.)

The first two reasons for Malta's survival are apparent. The third is not. If ever a place was ripe before the war for fifth columnism, Malta was it. A majority of people spoke Italian and before the war were dependent on trade with Italy for their existence. Not only were there active Axis agents on the island but there were many Italian sympathizers. These believed Mussolini would not bomb

Malta. When he did, they quickly threw in their lot with the British and loyal Maltese who considered themselves as much British as any Englishman.

Malta, unlike most fortresses in war time, felt no need to declare martial law. Throughout the blitz there was not a sign of a peace movement.

The fountain source for willing civilian resistance seems to have sprung from the fact that the majority of the politically articulate Maltese felt themselves British and that they had no desire for independence on the scale that the Burmese or other subject colonials had. The rest and major part of the population desired to fight on almost after the first Italian bombing. That made the people mad. Italian pilots bailing out over the island had to be rescued by the army from the hands of the angry people. After that, Axis sympathizers didn't dare to show their heads.

Gradually, the Maltese came to know the British better. Before the war most of the garrison had kept aloof. The officers had their own clubs and their own dances. Social life with the Maltese was practically nonexistent. But when the clubs were bombed, when the dances ceased and when the garrison was scattered defensively over a wider area of the island, the British began to mingle more with the Maltese, to make friends and even to marry. Over 200 soldiers of one infantry battalion alone married Maltese girls during the war.

The garrison and the people discovered they had a common aim. By the time the big blitz came, they were one in the desire to keep the invader out of the island. The people said: "We don't think we'll find a better nation than the British to govern us. If the island is lost to the Axis, we lose everything." That is one of the reasons why there was no sabotage, no movement for peace, no stab in the back. That is one of the reasons, too, why Malta held out when Hongkong, Singapore and Burma fell.

3

If Malta was not a Hongkong, it was also not a Corregidor. Corregidor had no fifth columnists, no violent proenemy patriots, in fact, it had no civil population at all. Yet it fell because it could not be supplied.

After the end of the big blitz in May, Malta faced the same problem. The main military lesson of the blitz seemed to have been that

air power alone cannot capture a fortress but that it can neutralize its offensive power provided the effort is heavy and sustained enough. Siege by air appeared practical.

The siege of Malta was now conducted not by close-in raiding operations but by a long-distance patrol of the island's lines of supply. Germans with their air power sought to prevent any relief ships on the Mediterranean from reaching Malta. In short, siege had settled down to a campaign to starve out Malta.

Even in normal times, Malta and the neighboring island of Gozo are not self-supporting. The hilly land is rocky and infertile. Whatever there is of cultivated ground was compulsorily imported as earth in the Middle Ages. The two islands depended on the outside world for grain, meat, butter, cheese, coal, petrol and all finished goods. Before the war, observers had estimated that the existing stocks on the island would not last a week.

Rommel's chances of starving out the island seemed good. Having seized Tobruk in June, 1942, he was in possession of African coastal airfields from which he could launch continuous air assaults on any ships attempting to reach Malta from the eastern Mediterranean. The Maltese knew well enough that they were isolated but the general sentiment of the island seemed to have been expressed somewhat melodramatically but feelingly by a shopkeeper who on hearing of the fall of Tobruk cried: "Never, never! I'll never be a slave!"

A serious battle to supply Malta began in June. One convoy started out from the eastern Mediterranean, another from Gibraltar in the west. It was hoped that one would get through.

A tremendous struggle over these convoys soon developed. Forces from all sides of the Mediterranean joined the battle. The Italian fleet came out to intercept the convoy from the east. British torpedo boats scurried to its assistance. Newly arrived Liberators of the U. S. Army's Ninth Air Force were ordered out against the Italian fleet. Other bombers were rushed against the Italian naval base at Taranto. A horde of Messerschmitts and bombers swarmed out of Crete and the coast of Africa to attack the convoy coming from the east. So severe was this attack that the destroyer escort used up most of their ammunition fighting off the attacking planes. Before it got halfway to Malta, the convoy turned back. The convoy coming from the west fared little better. Despite air cover, part of the convoy was sunk.

One day late in June, two ships from this convoy staggered into

Malta. Having learned their lesson in March, the soldiers, sailors and civilians rushed to the docks and worked cooperatively to unload ships. Wives carried food to dockyard workers who paused only momentarily to bite off a chunk of bread before turning back to unload more food from the ships. Other women passed ammunition to the gunners on the cliffs around the harbor. Within four and a half days, 15,000 tons were taken from the ships. A warship bringing stores to the island was unloaded, refueled and sailed within six and a half hours to give added protection to the convoy as it left.

Perhaps the arrival of even two ships angered the Germans; perhaps Malta's hit-and-run tactics against Rommel's Italo-Libyan shipping supply route embarrassed them. Whatever it was, the Luftwaffe returned in July to try to knock out the R.A.F. in a series of blitzes. But this time it was the Luftwaffe which was knocked out, and, having lost 150 planes, it gave up raiding the island at the end of the month. Local air superiority was now definitely in R.A.F. hands.

But local air superiority over Malta didn't matter if the Axis Air Force, operating from the African coast, Crete and Sicily, could prevent food from reaching the island.

Just how low the food was at the time few people on the island knew. One that did know was Governor Lord Gort. Arriving in March after the sinking of the convoy in the harbor, he had immediately tackled the supply situation. He set up defense and coordinating councils and a body to ration the island's stocks. It was their job to decide what goods the island needed most, what should be brought in first on the convoys.

The three service heads composing these councils were all experienced men. Major General Scobie had been the army's commander in the siege of Tobruk. Air Vice-Marshal Parke, in charge of fighter operations along the English coast during the blitz on England, had played a large part in winning the Battle of Britain. With this body Gort organized the resources of the island so well that in the words of one observer, "we made everything go three times what it had before. If we were going to starve, he at least ensured that we all starve together."

Realizing that undernourished people must conserve their energy, Gort attempted to ease up on the life of enlisted men. Physical training drills were abolished. Everyone was told to husband his strength.

Gort quickly won the support of the island. He did this in the first place by taking people into his confidence. When he explained that the ration system must be tightened up, instead of grumbling at smaller meals, the Maltese said: "It should have been done long before." Gort hadn't been long on the island before the people began calling him "Malta's luck."

"We knew," said a Maltese, "that Gort would produce no Singapores. We knew he would take us to the limit of Malta's endurance."

Gort made no bones of the fact that Malta couldn't endure forever. He told the people that he was rationing food and aiming at a "target date." Beyond that target date there would be no bread and the island presumably would have to surrender.

In August that target date was drawing nearer. Supplies from ships that had survived the blitz on the June convoy had not relieved the basic shortage on an island populated with a quarter million people. The food was low but worse than this was the fuel situation. There was no fuel for the power station, little kerosene or paraffin for cooking. Children were tearing doors and windows from bombed houses and gathering firewood for their mothers' cooking. Petrol and aviation spirit existed only in small quantities. This meant that soon pilots might not fly, but worst of all it meant that soon people could not cook their food.

London was fully cognizant of the situation. It tried to send help. A convoy starting from England was expected to reach the island by the middle of the month.

Fourteen ships loaded with food, petrol, fuel and ammunition rounded Gibraltar and steamed into the Mediterranean. A large escort of destroyers threw a screen around the convoy as it came eastward. An aircraft carrier was added to the naval guard. A protective cover of planes was kept in the air. This was a juicy piece of meat and the Axis came in to gobble it up. The Italians sent subs and E boats after it. As the convoy came near Sicily, the Luftwaffe took to the air and one of the biggest convoy battles ever seen in the Mediterranean began.

In the narrow Sicilian channel the merchantmen and their escort were mercilessly hammered. Food ships were scattered and sunk. Petrol ships exploded and burned on the sea. Oil poured onto the water and the Mediterranean itself burned. Ships following too close behind to change course kept on going through the flaming sea.

Forty crew members of one of the ships, frightened at the sight of flames on the sea ahead of them, dove overboard, but the captain continued straight on.

Not many ships got through the channel of Sicily. In the constant air battles that raged over the sea, damaged merchantmen became lost from the warship escort. One Australian ship, badly hit, was hailed by a French destroyer off the Tunisian coast. The captain of the destroyer ordered the merchantmen to wait while he reported to the admiral ashore. On coming back, the Frenchman announced that the admiral could not agree to the ship proceeding and ordered it into the harbor.

The captain of the merchantmen looked at the French naval officer, then at his own crew which was on the verge of mutiny. At last, speaking slowly and distinctly, he said: "I should like to comply with the admiral's advice, but my bow's shot away, both my anchors are gone and I couldn't possibly maneuver into your harbor. I think I'd better be on my way."

Then he yelled through the wheelhouse to his quartermaster: "Full speed ahead"; and steamed off. Perhaps the French officer was astonished; perhaps he was sympathetic, for he fired no shots and a few days later the triumphant Australian reached Malta.

Ahead of him a few badly scarred ships had already managed to make port. Among them, however, were no petrol ships.

Somewhere out at sea the badly damaged American tanker "Ohio" was making a last despairing effort to get her cargo to Malta. Bombed fore and aft with a hole from a torpedo through her middle, she was barely moving and was completely lost from her escort.

The anxious island officials, knowing that the "Ohio" with her cargo of petrol almost held the life of the island in her holds, hung on the radio waiting word from the tanker's captain.

A message announced: "I am making three and a half knots."

The officials cheered.

Another message came in: "I am being attacked from the air." Officials groaned.

Still a third message "my steering gear is gone. My gyro-compass is out. I am drifting. Where am I?"

While Malta was sending out planes to seek the stricken tanker, on the "Ohio" itself the crew was on the verge of abandoning ship. Suddenly, a destroyer came in sight. The crew took heart and stuck to their posts. Then another destroyer, crowded like the first with

survivors from a sunk merchantman, came up. Between the two warships the "Ohio" was firmly secured and the strange trio headed toward Malta like the lame leading the blind.

German planes sweeping in low from Sicily dropped mines, trying to block the harbor entrance. From Grand Harbor, British mine sweepers swept out to clear the way for the approaching tanker and destroyers. A battle took place in the air above the ships. The island officials crowded to the cliffs of Grand Harbor, scarcely daring to believe the tanker could make port.

On August 15, the day known as Santa Marija or Feast of Our Lady, the "Ohio" crawled into Grand Harbor and wearily tied up to the pier. Her decks were barely enough above water to allow the vital cargo of petrol to be taken out.

Later the captain of the "Ohio" was decorated with the George Cross. He deserved it. His arrival had saved Malta.

News of the arrival of the convoy spread fast through the island. But when the people rushed to the harbor and saw the pitiful handful of battered ships and burnt and mutilated survivors, many burst into tears. "In looking at the stricken ships and men," said Mabel Strickland, "we knew then that not even Malta could demand another August convoy of American and British seamen."

That day she told the people in an editorial in the *Times* of Malta that they must be prepared to hang on more grimly than ever. "The arrival of the convoy has put off the target date and we can stand a far longer siege and continue as a vital fighting unit," declared the courageous paper. "But there can be no room for illusion or hope. The keynote is: Conserve your supplies."

In June and July a ration of tomatoes, figs and grapes had been brought in *degghaises* from neighboring Gozo. But by the end of August this supply had dried up. Between May and August the government had instituted a wheat campaign but the hard-pressed peasant held grimly to his grain as to his life. Bread rations went down to ten ounces a day. Between June and August when fodder could not be found to feed the cattle, one-third of the goats had been killed. Now almost all the goats and pigs were slaughtered. Chickens disappeared completely and rabbits burrowed into the countryside, seeking to escape hungry hunters. With the killing of the goats, the milk supply was shut off at its source. Babies had to be fed from the diminishing stocks of powdered milk. Oranges were formally restricted to pregnant mothers, children under seven and some of

the garrison. Because of the lack of fuel, communal kitchens, which the authorities named "victory kitchens" but which the people quickly called "siege kitchens," were set up to feed designated blocks of streets in the small towns. One meal, generally *minestra*, was all that a person was allowed a day in these kitchens.

Rations were issued every fortnight: a can of bully beef and a can-smoked herring between two people every two weeks. Heads of families took charge of the rations and doled them out day by day. Other people were so hungry that they finished their rations in a few days. They starved one week and ate the next.

In the issuance of rations, according to the statement of the Maltese upper classes, there was an absolute equity. "The governor rode a bicycle and ate the same food we did," said the Maltese. "We thanked God for that and carried on."

Transportation became difficult. Kerosene was mixed 50 per cent with gasoline. Cars, unlike the people, were unable to assimilate the reduced diet and stalled on streets. The main burden of transport fell on the backs of horses. Some people advocated killing the horses and saving fodder and eating the meat. The local food strategists replied that if this were done, there would be no transport and consequently no way to distribute the horsemeat. The horses were saved from the guillotine but, undernourished, they began to weaken, go into second gear on the slopes and fall down on the hills. Loads had to be lightened.

Food, as is usual in such cases, showed symptoms of becoming money. As prices on the black market went up, the value of paper money went down. People hoarded coins. Shops and bars printed coupons for small money. Safety pins and stamps were used as change. Barter economy raised its ancient head. Exchange of food articles was definitely encouraged. The authorities said: "We can't ration to suit everyone's taste. There is no need to think you are dealing in the black market if you trade a tin of sardines for some peas." As commodities grew scarcer, doctors took their fees in cigarettes and food. Babies were delivered for a drink of whiskey.

Men and women today joke about the shortage of food in the island in the autumn of 1942. They tell about the officer who flew out of Malta to England. Accosted by a friend, he was asked about the siege.

"Tell me," said the friend, "did you really eat horsemeat?"

"Horsemeat!" exclaimed the officer. "Ah, those were the good old days."

But then they didn't joke. A common saying was, "We prefer bombs to no food." The people in the autumn of 1942 were not starving but they were growing weaker. Available food was only enough to keep them going. Walking three or four miles to the office, ciphersettes or government clerks sometimes fainted on the streets. Anything that was weak was being pushed slowly toward the wall. Men in ack-ack units worried about the winter blitz, not knowing how much they could stand in their weakened condition.

For the first time since the British established rule over the island in 1800, vital statistics showed more deaths than births. Women rarely became pregnant. Men were in no condition to produce babies. Sexual intercourse grew less. During the height of the food siege, a government official declared: "There was a period of three months when I never thought of touching my wife." People were too tired for sex. There was no longer any need for the people to make contraceptives out of old inner-tube linings.

In everything people became ration-minded. A woman who had a head cold found that her maid was rationing her handkerchiefs. "There isn't enough soap to wash them," explained the maid.

Another young girl declared: "I shall not marry because my husband will come and eat my bread same as my brother eats my mother's bread."

As September and October passed without any ships entering Malta, a dogged gloom set over the people. There seemed to be no hope anywhere. If news from the outside had been good, the islanders would have felt better. They needed a beacon for guidance. There was none.

At the height of the depression in October, 1942, the Luftwaffe suddenly returned to the island. The ration-fed R.A.F. pilots had been striking once more against Rommel's supply route from Italy to Libya, and, stalled before Alamein, he was evidently feeling the pinch. But this time the Maltese did not have to suffer the horrors of a blitz on top of semistarvation. Practicing interception tactics, perfected by the Air Vice-Marshal Parke, Spitfires went out over the sea to meet the Axis raiders coming in from Sicily. Few planes ever reached the island. In an eight-day battle in the middle of the month, the R.A.F. impartially massacred German fighters and

bombers. One hundred and fifty planes were shot down into the sea and that nearly finished the Luftwaffe. It never came back. Shortly after the October air battle came news that thrilled the whole island of Malta as it probably thrilled few people in the world. Montgomery had cracked Rommel at Alamein and Eisenhower had landed in North Africa. For the first time in many months the Maltese said: "There is hope."

One night in late November while most of Malta slept, a convoy stole silently into the harbor. The next day thousands of people crowded down onto the Barracca to feast their eyes on the ships carrying the long-awaited food. Someone in the crowd yelled: "There'll always be an England"; someone else yelled back: "There'll always be a Malta." Voices singing "God Save the King" rent the air and Maltese songs floated over the harbor. The long siege had been lifted.

During the siege, the people and garrison of Malta not only were subjected to a terrific material beating; they also were bashed and badly mauled psychologically. Something happened to these people living cramped up together so long. There was no social escape for anyone. A person either escaped within himself or to the person nearest at hand. In the former case, people developed a sense of frustration and persecution; in the latter, people unsuited to each other were thrown together.

When the blitz and the siege let up, there was no way to reestablish normal social functions. Created in hardship and nourished in the necessary intimacy of siege, crazy love affairs sprang up between Maltese girls and British servicemen. Girls fell in love with men who they knew were married; cipherettes gazed with hungry eyes at officers they knew didn't suit them. They couldn't help themselves; for the intimacy of siege is a potent Cupid.

After an air blitz and a food shortage, such psychological troubles as these may appear trifling. But the lifting of the siege did not eliminate the pressing material, personal and social difficulties on the island; it only brought them into focus.

I went to see the family of an Irish fusilier in a badly bombed section of the island. His young wife, with three children clinging to her skirts, met me at the door and invited me in.

"What's life like for an English family here?" I asked.

"Life," she laughed. "There is no life. We thought we had passage home on the plane. We sold all our belongings. Then passage

was canceled. I sold plates for six pence and I had to pay two and six to get them back. I sold our primus for five shillings and it cost me forty-five to get another. But many things we sold to people who needed them and we can't buy anything here at all.

"We have no warm clothing for the kiddies. In summer 'tis all right; they live in their bathing suits and play all day in the sea; but now with the cold weather I don't know what they'll do."

She fingered a thin rag her girl was wearing and laughed.

"We have no shoes either. I have cut up old suitcases and made shoes for them. Worst of all is that there are no schools for the kiddies. They have been in a slit trench as much as they've been in school."

"You can teach them," I ventured.

She showed her bright teeth and her blue eyes danced.

"Oh, I have nothing in my head. I can't teach them. There's nothing for them to do either. It was raining this morning and I said: 'Go play in the bombed buildings.' But they came back and said there was no roof, and they were all wet."

"What do you do for cooking?"

"The kiddies gather firewood from the bombed buildings. It is a good thing that there was a blitz," she said laughing again.

"What do you eat?"

"Corned beef. I camouflage it but it's still corned beef. We have had milk the last four weeks and that's helped."

"What about soap and tooth paste?"

"Our grandmother in England recently sent us some. That's the only way we got it. We got some chocolates sent us for Christmas, 1941, just a few days ago. They were over a year old but they tasted good."

"Would you like to leave Malta?"

"Would I!" She laughed again, tossed her golden head, and her blue eyes gleamed.

A former ack-ack gunner took me over to Isola Point where he had his gun during the blitz. A narrow peninsula sticking out into the harbor, it had been bombed worse than any other place in Malta.

Jim Gaffarena, a dockyard worker in charge of a shelter settlement living there, showed us around.

"You don't know what happened since you left here," he said to my friend. "God! It's worse than the blitz."

We went into a narrow dark cavern tunneled out of the side of

a cliff. In the light of a candle I saw a line of dirty slat-boards hung one above the other against a dank wall. Dirty and smelling badly, they looked like befouled mangers, and they were damp, no doubt from water dripping through the cavern's roof. By one ill-appearing slat bed we paused and Gaffarena said: "Mother and daughter and two sons sleep on this bed. The mother has tuberculosis. When it rains, the water leaks down. I went to the officials and I told them about her. They said to me: 'Tell her if she wants to keep dry to buy an umbrella.' Where can you buy an umbrella in this island; where can she get the money; what would she need an umbrella for in bed? But these people don't care for the poor.

"This used to be the cleanest shelter in Malta. We got a medal for it. Now look at it."

We went outside again. About the tunnel entrance were grouped tiny huts built out of blitzed doors and tables. All of them swarmed with women and children. Long, webby hair hung down over their emaciated faces. Their eyes leaden, the women crowded around me and the bellies of some big with unborn babies pressed against me.

Gaffarena jerked his head at one. "She's supposed to get oranges because she's pregnant. When she goes to get them, the rations officer says: 'Get them next week.' Always next week but she never gets them. We are always short of something. It's not like that with other people. Why us alone?

"Look at these kids," he said, pointing to a horde of bony children dressed in one-piece rags. I saw them staring at me quietly, and off on a rock I saw two boys making a ship out of a wooden crate. On the mast they had hoisted a British and a Maltese flag. "They wanted to give a feast for the children on the island," continued the dockyard worker. "Do you think these children were invited? No; they want children who are dressed up-to-date. These children got no clothing; they can't go to the feast.

"They can't go to school even. They won't keep them in the school unless they got shoes and clean clothes. I don't know why." He shook his graying head and muttered to himself. "You try and do something. Please you try. I try and it's no good. I talk to officials like I talk to you now and they say: 'Agitator.' Me, an agitator! Sailors on ship they know how we feel. We get food when they come here. We go over for the garbage and refuse but they don't give us refuse, they give us food."

We were climbing a hill going toward a blitzed town when sud-

denly from out of a hut came the sound of someone moaning, and then two small children appeared in a doorway and peered at us with frightened eyes.

"That woman in there is going to have a baby soon," said our guide. "Too much immorality going on here. Vice. Very rife. I can't stop it. Small children see babies born. What are you going to do with them? No place to send them."

Winding slowly through an amphitheatre of ruins, we reached the crest of a hill and came out on what had once been a broad avenue, named Victory Street. Before us spread an alley of utter desolation. On either side ran shapeless walls of stone that had once been houses. In the roadway lay tremendous slabs of rock and a huge gun that had ripped out of a destroyer in the harbor and blown over two blocks of houses into this street. Every fifty yards in this ruined corridor, hills of rubble rose like breastworks and we struggled up and down over these barriers, growing out of breath on what had once been a level street.

It was a desolate wilderness of broken stone. Not a dog or human being to be seen! Undamaged, in the center of the street, stood a statue of the Virgin Mary with Child in her arms.

Gaffarena crossed himself, looked sadly at the ruins and said: "Look at this and tell me who are the real heroes of Malta. It is the people and that's the truth."

Coming over the rubble barrier, we suddenly emerged on a street corner that had been almost untouched. On a curbstone sat a young woman. Her shapely body was clad in a one-piece black garment. When she swayed back and forth on the curbstone, it seemed as if it were the only garment she wore. Her legs were bare, her shoes torn. Black hair fell around a red, healthy face. Her smile was invigorating, her eyes dark and bold. She was altogether pretty but her appearance was marred by scabs and skin sores on her arms and neck.

I had my notebook and pencil in my hand. Perhaps she thought I was an official for she called out: "Rations."

"She wants to know when the rations are going to be increased," said Gaffarena translating her Maltese chatter.

"I guess when the war is over," I replied.

"The war feenish," she said speaking in English and doubling up with laughter. "Musso feenish. Hitler feenish."

"Why does a pretty girl like you sit on the curbstone like this?" I said.

"I got nothing to do."

"Where's your husband?"

"He's working at the dockyard—in Alex. I haven't seen him for three years. He sends me a pound a week."

"What's the matter with your skin?" I said pointing to the sores on her arms.

She let out a loud shriek and doubled up with laughter again. "Scabies, scabies," she squealed.

A group of women and children, no doubt attracted by our conversation, had somehow mysteriously appeared from an undamaged near-by church and were now gathered around us. One of these said: "She gets those sores from the bombing. Every time there is a bombing, she gets sick in her house and sores come out."

I looked at the girl; she was blushing.

"When will the government bring clothing?" she said, changing the subject.

I was writing down her remarks in my notebook. She glanced up at me from the curbstone and said: "That's right, you write down. Write like this. Bring me shoes. Bring me clothing."

"And lipstick?" said the ack-ack gunner.

Just then the girl screamed, jumped up from the curbstone, rushed down the street and swept into her arms a small child with yellow hair and an engaging smile who was running pell-mell to meet her.

She came back to us, a radiant smile on her face. "This is my son. You must bring him shoes and babies' clothing. No lipstick. No rouge. Only shoes and clothing. But you might bring me," she said with a motion toward her head and a dimple in her cheek, "a *fal-detta* [hood] for the church."

A woman at the rear of the circle around us cried: "Bring me bloomers." At this everyone burst into laughter and jumped up and down crying: "Maria wants bloomers," and other voices shouted: "I want a nightdress, I want stockings."

As I started to go, the girl said: "My name is Evelyn Mitzi and the number of my house is fifty-one. You must put that down too or how will they know where to send it?"

Wandering down the hill through ruins and hearing the echo of their voices at my heels, I thought to myself: "What kind of a game of make-believe is this?"

That night I went to a barroom.

There was an English girl named Peggie behind the bar. She said she was nineteen and looked it.

"What's a bar girl do during a siege?" I said.

"I have a date with a different fella every night," she said, and her voice was challenging.

"What do you do for lipstick?"

She pulled a compact and lipstick out of her bag. "The customers give it to me," she said with a funny smile that seemed to say please don't hit me. "They get it off the black market."

"Where do you live?"

"With mom and dad."

"What does your father do?"

"He works in one of the government offices."

"What time do you close?"

"Ten o'clock."

"Can I take you home?"

"No."

"Got a date?"

"No."

I tried another tack. "Why did you become a bar girl?"

"You can't live on this island and do nothing. Besides, I can use the money."

"How much do you get?"

"Four pounds a month."

"What did you do before the siege?"

"We had a car. Mom and Dad and my brother and I used to drive around the island. We used to go on picnics."

Her voice softened and she looked up from the bar as if she were staring at something. "There used to be a bunch of girls and fellas and we used to go walking on the cliffs in the moonlight. You can't walk there now," she said with sudden bitterness. "It's been bombed. There are guns there."

The bartender announced the bar was closing. The girl Peggie was putting on her coat and I ventured the question once again.

"I will walk you home," I said.

"Come on," she said jerkily, and we went out into the streets of Valletta.

A three-quarter moon was hanging over a bombed palace, the wind was blowing in from the sea and the girl hurried so fast that

her shoes clattered loudly on the stone pavement. With me at her heels she nearly flew down the street, tumbled down a flight of stone steps and turned a corner swiftly as if a gang of hoodlums were after her.

"Take it easy," I said.

"I can't," she said in a strained tone. "Mom and dad are waiting for me."

"Let's just take a stroll in the moonlight," I said.

"I told you there's no place any more," she said in an angry bitter voice.

"You're a funny girl," I said.

"You don't know me," she said. "No one knows me."

There was something eating her and I didn't know what it was.

"What shall I bring you when I come back to Malta?" I said. "Lipstick? Stockings?"

She halted momentarily in the street, her lips a pout in the dark, and she said: "I don't want anything from you. Don't bring me anything," and once more she hurried on.

We were going down a narrow, dark street and I took her hand and softly asked: "Why?" She did not answer but she did not take her hand away, only let it hang limply in mine.

Suddenly, she tightened her grasp on my hand, came to a halt and said: "Look! the moon is shining through that bombed building."

I peered at a building on my right and saw a light in a window.

"That's a light," I said, "not the moon."

"No," she said, "'tis the moon. I've seen it often like that."

We went closer and I saw she was right.

She still clasped my hand tightly; the moon was shining on her hair and I could feel her breathing heavily. Still holding her hand I doubled her arm back of her, twisted her around and kissed her.

For a moment her lips hung open and moist and then she struggled away, and before I knew what was happening, she had seized my coat at the two shoulders and was shaking me and saying in a low intense tone: "Damn you, damn you."

Too astonished to move, I let her continue shaking me, but suddenly her arms crept from my shoulders around my neck, her head went down on my shoulder and she was sobbing.

Her body quivered and shook convulsively and I must confess I

didn't know what to do but stroke her hair and wait for the flood of tears to subside.

The intensity of her sobbing was dying; her arms were tightening around me and she began to murmur from the midst of my shoulder.

"I don't want any lipsticks or stockings. Why did you say that? I don't want work in a bar. I do not want to go out with a different fella every night. . . . I'm so tired. . . . Oh, you're all beasts. I want someone, just someone who will give me nothing. I want to be quiet again, go on picnics again. Walk in the moonlight on the cliffs. Damn you, damn you, I don't want to see moonlight through bombed buildings. I want the opera house and the cinema and our car."

With a strange frightened feeling I listened to her. What a world of stupid irony there was in all this for me! Here was I, a war correspondent thinking about the siege of Malta. Thinking of how I would write the story, thinking of the R.A.F., the navy and the army, and here was a nineteen-year-old girl in my arms sobbing her heart out and not the least interested in how many German Messerschmitts had been downed over Malta.

I tried to think of something to say but she stopped my mouth with kisses. She had suddenly jerked up her head, kissed me softly once, then quickly, one-two-three, more violently and then at great length as if she would stop my breathing.

With a little gasp she stopped as suddenly as she had begun, squeezed my hand hard, said: "Mom and Dad are waiting for me. I will catch hell," and then ran down the street before I knew what she was doing.

I watched her fleeting figure disappearing around a corner, stilled a sigh and started walking home. A light still shown in the window of the bombed building.

Chapter V

The Battle of the Mareth Line

"However highly we must value courage and steadfastness in war, and however little prospect for victory there is for him who cannot resolve to see it by the exertion of all his strength, still there is a point beyond which perseverance can only be called desperate folly, and therefore cannot be approved by any critic.

"... a swift and vigorous transition to attack—the flashing sword of vengeance—is the most brilliant point of the defensive."

—VON CLAUSEWITZ

I

LATE in February, 1943, Field Marshal Erwin Rommel's position in southern Tunisia was daily growing more desperate. He had by quick concentration of his mobile Panzer units beat up the Americans around Kasserine Pass, seized three airfields, presumably destroyed American front-line supply dumps there and thus forestalled an attack against him on the central sector of the Tunisian front. But while he had been operating with quick though temporary success against the weak and inexperienced Americans under General Patton in the north, the far stronger and more experienced Montgomery had been able without hindrance from the air or ground to bring up part of his Eighth Army and prepare an assault on the Mareth Line in the south. This placed Rommel in an awkward predicament.

If he decided to avoid the threat of Montgomery and withdraw from the Mareth Line without a fight, he would abandon a naturally strong position and would allow Montgomery to move north and link up with the Americans. If he decided passively to wait in the Mareth Line for Montgomery to attack him, he gave that general

time to concentrate and build up an overwhelmingly superior force; at the same time he ran the risk of being smashed in his positions as at Alamein, and of being forced to retreat in one jump to Tunis. If he decided to come out of the Mareth Line and attack Montgomery before the British general had mobilized his full strength, he ran another risk of receiving a rebuff and weakening himself to such an extent that he could not properly man the defense of the Mareth Line.

Rommel chose this last alternative.

Rommel's decision was dictated by larger considerations than the immediate tactical ones of his own front. He and his co-partner Arnim in north Tunisia, with only a one-to-ten chance of gaining a victory over the Allied armies closing in on them from the north and south, had apparently been given the task of delaying the loss of Tunisia until summer, possibly until June or July, in order to forestall an Allied attack on south Europe.

Rommel's share in this task was to delay Montgomery.

His views on how this was to be done were apparently limited in vision. His objective was consequently equally limited. He planned to swoop out of the Mareth Line across the plains to Medenine, seize that town and destroy Montgomery's supply dumps there. This would force Montgomery once more to bring supplies up from his rear bases 1,500 miles to the east. Perhaps by this maneuver Rommel hoped to gain a month's grace.

From an ideal standpoint, Rommel's chances of success were reasonably auspicious. Operating on interior lines, he could dare first to strike in the north and then in the south. But the secret of such tactics in the words of Napoleon is that you must be stronger than the enemy at the given time. Rommel badly miscalculated the time element.

Having no doubt received information from his spies that Montgomery was in no strength before the Mareth Line, Rommel, toward the first of March, swept south with the Twenty-first, Fifteenth, and half of the Tenth Panzer Divisions.

Instead of risking everything in a swift surprise attack, when Montgomery had only the Fifty-first Highland Division and the Seventh Armored Division in the line and while his supplies were still coming up from Tripoli, Rommel, whose communications perhaps delayed him, sat down to prepare properly. Concentrating behind the screen of the Mareth Line and the Matmata Hills, he

began blowing up lanes in his defensive mine fields to give him a path through to Montgomery. The British general withdrew his advanced units into defensive positions and rushed up the New Zealand Division and units of the Scots Guards.

Rommel already had made two grave blunders by not attacking in time and by tipping his hand and losing the element of surprise. Nevertheless, he proceeded with his plans.

The ground he chose for his ill-timed assault was between the towns of Mareth and Medenine, on a rock-strewn, arid plain, anchored on the east by the Mediterranean and on the west by the Matmata Hills. There are several noteworthy features in this plain. Firstly, the Matmata Hills, then held by the Germans, command a view of the whole plain and all the roads. They also offer a screen for the concentration of a mass of maneuver and for concealing the direction of attack. Secondly, in the heart of the plain there are two isolated hills—the higher one dubbed Elephant Hill and running to 800 feet—that command local actions around Medenine. These hills were held by the British and gave them good observation when acting on the defense, though not of so much use when operating on the offense against the higher Matmatas. Thirdly, the deceptive nature of the plain itself makes it look perfectly flat from a distance, but in reality it consists of rolling country, broken into natural gulches, wadis and ravines, where a few trees, dried-up stream beds and ditches offer concealment for antitank guns.

Unknown to Rommel, the greatest number of antitank guns the Eighth Army ever had were hidden in just these positions athwart likely German tank run-ins.

Not realizing the extent of the preparations against him, Rommel on the night of March 5 arrived at El Halouff in the hills, and after briefly talking with his soldiers in his usual informal fashion he gave the order that sent the tanks, under cover of an extremely black night, out of the hills into the plains in front of the British positions.

"We will attack at dawn and take Medenine by dusk," Rommel told his tank crews as they departed.

In the meantime, on the other side of the lines Montgomery, who for several days had been expecting Rommel, had already written in longhand a message of quite different tenor to his troops:

"The enemy is caught like a rat in a trap and is hitting out in all directions. . . . I didn't expect for one moment that he would

attack us. It seemed absurd. But he has done it and we must show our gratitude in no uncertain way. . . . We will stand and fight in our present positions. We have plenty of tanks and, provided the defended localities hold out, we'll give him a very bloody nose."

At first light on March 6, Rommel advanced to get his bloody nose.

A heavy dew glistened on the ground and the haze was just lifting from the lower slopes of the Matmata Hills when British patrols heard a faint clank of metal hitting the ground. Nearer and nearer, faster and louder, louder and faster the sound came. Suddenly, at a distance of 3,000 yards from the British lines there emerged from the mists one hundred of Rommel's tanks deployed for action along an eight-mile front.

As far as could be made out in the dust and confusion, the tanks were in three groups—thirty in one, thirty in another and forty in a third. At first in curiosity, then in disbelief, and finally with joy British officers watched this cavalcade advance against their strongest positions in the center and left center, not concentrated in strength but dispersed over a wide area. It seemed as if Rommel, the leading exponent of armor concentration, in his last desperate gamble had lost his nerve and hedged. This is what the British with their antitank guns wanted, and they coolly held their fire.

After milling around uncertainly for a while, one group of Mark III's and Mark IV's headed straight toward the British left center with the apparent intention of breaking through to the rear of Medenine. Coming on a dummy mine field, the tanks swerved sharply and, exposing their flanks, ran directly into antitank guns. Seven tanks were put out of battle in a few minutes.

Further up the line twelve more tanks were similarly caught when the German column leaders failed to notice a dip of ground, ran into another ambush and were destroyed before they knew what hit them.

These two actions, however, were feeble in comparison with what took place a few hundred yards away in the center of the battlefield. The chief action of the battle of Medenine was fought in a dried-up river bed, since nicknamed Panzer Gulch, where Rommel threw an armor and infantry spearhead supported by Stuka dive bombers against the British units.

The battle began with an exchange of artillery fire. Then when the smoke was mingling with the haze rising from the dewy

ground, a heavy German tank column swarmed up a ridge that overlooked the dried-up stream bed.

From the ridge to where Sergeant Ivor Andrews and his crew stood behind their six-pounder was a thousand yards.

Andrews could see the tanks coming up and he counted fourteen. Four of these he let go by to be ambushed by a gun in another wadi, and then rapidly he knocked out the fifth, sixth and seventh tanks and, disorganizing the whole column, sent the other ten scurrying for shelter in hull-down positions.

But here the German attack was fiercer and other tanks swarming over the slope and charging down Panzer Gulch attacked Andrews from the side. A Mark IV with rapid bursts of its 75-mm. gun forced Andrews and his crew out of their pit into shelter behind a protecting hummock of ground.

Andrews shook himself and, like Dempsey coming back into the ring against Firpo, crawled back into his pit, turned his gun around and drove off the Mark IV.

As the morning wore on, however, the Germans brought up more tanks and, rushing up infantry in lorries to the edge of the battlefield, first overran a British platoon and then a whole company. By midafternoon it momentarily appeared as if the Germans might achieve a breakthrough.

Up until this moment Montgomery had withheld his own armor from the battle. But at an opportune moment he suddenly loosed a lone squadron of Sherman tanks against the threatened position, and with this thunderbolt of assault the British quickly knocked out six more of the enemy tanks, rescued the overrun company and swept the Germans from the field. Behind them the Germans left twenty-seven burning, shattered tanks.

Evening was now approaching and Rommel had definitely lost the battle. At least forty tanks¹ by this time had been destroyed and more had been put out of action. Perhaps Rommel did not know this; perhaps reports were late in coming to him. At any rate he put in another attack, blindly proceeding with his prearranged plans which were now meaningless.

Rommel had become desperate and, in becoming desperate, it seems he almost became mad. Like a harassed gambler throwing good money after bad, he assembled 1,000 foot soldiers in the plains

¹ Fifty-two tanks were destroyed during the day.

and sought to storm the positions his heavy tanks had been unable to penetrate.

The sun sinking toward the Matmata Hills was shining in the British gunners' eyes as German lorries drove across the plains and disgorged 1,000 shock troops just southwest of Elephant Hill. Perhaps Rommel was counting on the setting sun to blind the British gunners, but the only thing blind in the plains that day was Rommel's own folly.

Before the German infantry could take one step forward to attack, before it could even form for that attack, 150 British guns were pouring shells at the rate of 200 a minute into the German ranks packed into an area a mile square.

Within a few moments hundreds of slain and wounded lay in the arid, inhospitable plain before the British positions. Mercifully, the sun sank quickly below the Matmata Hills and soon darkness, mingling with the dust, haze and smoke, veiled everything from sight.

Over the whole plain, previously so fatefully beautiful with the white blossoms of artillery smoke, there now spread a mist of dampness that the pale new crescent moon shining vaguely on the white minaret of Medenine was too weak to disperse. Here and there in the dimness gleamed the fires of still-burning tanks, and once in a while could be heard the rumble of German lorries carrying away the corpses of the same men they had a few hours before brought so hopefully forward to storm Medenine.

When dawn came the next morning, there was scarcely a living member—soldier or tank—of the German Panzer host left in the plain. Rommel, who had suffered the quickest and sharpest drubbing of his desert career, had given up and withdrawn to the hills to lick his wounds.

2

Observers called the action at Medenine "the perfect battle." Such superlatives hold little interest for us, but what is important is that by coming out of the desert Rommel, the leading exponent of armor concentration, had demonstrated the inadequacy of his own favorite weapon. Away from flat sands which invite wide sweeping maneuvers over hundreds of miles of unimpeded terrain, the tank was no longer king of the battlefield.

Small though the battle at Medenine was, it had historic implica-

tions for the British soldier. The significance was not that Rommel was beaten; that was expected; but how he was beaten. The air force, while prior to the battle it may have impeded Rommel's supplies and given Montgomery knowledge of Rommel's intentions, on the day of battle exercised no direct influence at all. The artillery, while it was busily engaged with enemy artillery, was not an important factor save in the breaking up of a German infantry attack in the late afternoon. Montgomery used no tanks of his own until near the end of the action when a lone squadron of Shermans went to the rescue of an overrun infantry position.

It was the infantry, armed with two-pounders and six-pounders, that beat back the German attack and knocked out tanks almost as easily as a machine gun will knock out a man. At Medenine was the first time that British infantry had been able to withstand a full-scale German tank assault and beat it back with heavy losses. From a tactical standpoint then, this battle was somewhat historic.

The personal significance of Medenine for the soldier in the line was equally historic. Henceforth, he could not only say: "I am the man that suffers; I am the man who gets the dirty end of the stick in war," but he could throw back into the teeth of the airmen and tankmen the phrase, "I am the man who wins the battles."

Medenine, by winning back for the unappreciated foot soldier a just assessment of his value, rightly forecast the paramount importance of infantry in the Mareth Line, at Wadi Akarit, Tunis, Sicily and Italy. Also, unless political factors came to the fore, it prophesied an infantry war in Europe. The blood of the foot soldier had become the fuel that ran the tanks.

To a layman, Medenine proposed several lessons:

1. Rommel, noted not so much as a strategist but as a brilliant opportunist-tactician, by failing to attack at an earlier moment lost any opportunity of victory.
2. He gave his intentions away, lost the effect of surprise and allowed Montgomery to concentrate to meet him.
3. His intelligence was at fault and he failed to appreciate either the extent or the disposition of Montgomery's preparations.
4. Instead of trying to outflank Montgomery he brashly attacked him in the center of his line and three of his columns went straight into ambushes which he should have anticipated, having himself previously occupied the ground for some time.
5. His tank men's failure to study the ground thoroughly and

make full use of their maps increased the effectiveness of the ambushes.

6. Although he deliberately attacked Montgomery's center, Rommel dispersed his forces to such an extent that his attack lacked accumulative continuity.

Many of these observations tempted observers to believe that Rommel did not direct the battle himself. His dispersed attack was not like the concentrated thrusts of the old Rommel.

This new Rommel seemed to be a different man. The new Rommel seemed to have lost the confidence of the old; consequently he had lost his vigor and dash, and he had lost his tactical nerve.

Although Rommel had conducted his retreat across Africa with consummate skill and courage, his desperate position at the last seemed to have opened psychological fissures in him as a general. At any rate, he had begun to hedge, and in doing that he had displayed signs of definite mediocrity.

That was a heartening sign to the Eighth Army as it prepared to attack the Mareth Line.

3

Having beaten back Rommel's attack and tested his own superiority, Montgomery in the middle of March redispersed his troops and prepared to assault the Mareth Line.

For this assault, he had during the two months following the capture of Tripoli been able to amass over his long desert and sea line of communications enough supplies to power two corps, composed of four and a half infantry divisions, two tank divisions, with about 600 tanks, and 800 guns.

Against him and behind reinforced concrete emplacements, his opponent Rommel drew up the remnants of the following units:

Germans: Fifteenth Panzer Division; Twenty-first Panzer Division; Hundred Sixty-fourth Division; Ninetieth Light Infantry Division; Panzer grenadiers.

Italians: scattered units of the Spezia, Trieste, Pistoia and Fascist Youth Divisions.

Rommel's tank strength was one-sixth that of Montgomery's; his gun strength, probably not more than a third at most of the British general's. In total numbers of men Montgomery had a slight superiority. In the air his superiority was decided, the Luftwaffe

for a number of weeks having been confined almost solely to night operations. Rommel's chief asset was the heavily fortified Mareth Line and the dominating Matmata Hills.



THE BATTLE OF THE MARETH LINE

With his superior strength and consequently possessing the ability to move reserves almost at will without fear of being attacked himself, Montgomery was able to force his plan of battle, though not the ground at Mareth, which Rommel had chosen, on the enemy. This plan broadly speaking consisted in a double envelopment,

with the ideal objective of encircling Rommel near Gabes and cutting off his retreat northward.

The two arms of Montgomery's planned encirclement were formed as follows: On the right, a spearhead of assault was organized from the Fiftieth Division which was to penetrate the Mareth Line near the sea. Through the gap formed by this infantry was to be pushed the main armor of the Eighth Army. On the left, a mass of maneuver, consisting of 27,000 men, 200 guns and nearly 150 tanks of the New Zealand Division and an armored brigade, was formed under General Freyberg, who was to skirt the southern flank of the Mareth Line, march around the Matmata Hills for 200 miles across the desert and attack Rommel in his north and east. These right and left columns were, according to the ideal plan, to come together in the region of Gabes and catch Rommel in a bag. The attack by both columns was scheduled to start on March 20, the first night of the full moon—an auspicious sign for Montgomery, who had launched his attack at Alamein under a full moon.

Because he had to cover 250 miles in attacking toward Gabes, while the Fifty-ninth Division attacking the Mareth Line only had to cover fifty miles, General Freyberg started sneaking south around the Matmata Hills on March 16, four days before the general attack was scheduled to get under way.

With radios silent and under the utmost secrecy, Freyberg moved only at night, until near the end of the third day, his march having been discovered by German planes, he began going all-out, night and day, across the trackless but previously reconnoitered desert toward the oasis of El Hamma and Gabes. In the meantime, as had been arranged, Montgomery began his main assault on the Mareth Line.

At ten o'clock at night, precisely the same hour he opened the Alamein battle, and again under a full moon, Montgomery ordered 400 to 600 guns to concentrate their fire in an area 4,000 yards wide against enemy pillboxes near the Mediterranean.

Under cover of this artillery bombardment, which veteran soldiers declared was one of the severest they had ever seen, a brigade of the Fiftieth Division moved forward on foot and in infantry tanks across marshy, broken ground that was alternately brilliantly lit by the full moon and then half obscured by smoke and dust arising from exploding shells.

By dawn on the first day of spring, these troops had captured

three enemy strong points, controlled three others and taken 500 prisoners, among them 140 Italians who voluntarily surrendered with their colonel because they couldn't withstand the severity of the shelling. A penetration 1,000 yards deep on a 5,000-yard front had been made in the Mareth Line. In the desert this advance would have been nothing, but here it was a considerable achievement.

During the second night, this gap was slightly enlarged and consolidated, but so determined was the German resistance, especially that of isolated machine gunners, that the British were unable to make an adequate hole through which they could pour their armor.

The chief obstacle to further progress was a deep, soft-bottomed, partially water-filled gulch, known as Wadi Zigzaou, which British infantry had crossed but which still barred the way to Grant and Sherman tanks. Although British engineers estimated they needed only three hours to build an adequate tank bridgehead of faggots, the German enfilading machine-gun fire was so severe that Bengali and Madras sappers working in the wadi had not been able to complete their job.

Not only were tanks unable to cross the wadi, but the infantry that had crossed and entered the Mareth Line were forced to hold onto their positions with little ammunition, insufficient food and no chance to bring back their wounded in the daytime. More ominous than anything was the fact that antitank guns had not been brought across, and the infantry occupying the salient in the German positions was now in acute danger in case the enemy should launch a counterattack.

During the first two days of the Mareth battle, Rommel for some reason did not counterattack the very vulnerable British positions. It seemed then as if he was not aware that the main British attack was being launched in this section and he wished to conserve his reserves. For this reason, it also appeared as if Montgomery's attack near the sea would be crowned with the same quick success as a similar attack at Alamein. This hope, however, was short-lived.

On the afternoon of March 22, realizing that, if he waited any longer, the gap in his lines might be enlarged and his position overrun by British armor, Rommel swung three battalions and fifty Mark III and Mark IV tanks of his Fifteenth Panzer Division against the British infantry isolated in the heart of the Mareth Line.

Without antitank guns, armed with only a few sticky bombs and weary from sixty sleepless hours, these soldiers, composed of

the Durham Light Infantry who had crossed the wadi, fought back, gallantly contesting every yard with the Germans. But the odds were too great and by nightfall the enemy had reoccupied most of his lost ground and pushed the Durham foot soldiers and their light and helpless Valentine tanks back to the brink of the wadi. Here a line was momentarily held.

To retrieve the desperate plight of this infantry and his whole attack on the Mareth Line, Montgomery ordered the other brigade of the Fiftieth Division to counterattack the German counterattackers. This time the British staff planned to bring up antitank guns, rush repairs on the wadi bridgehead and bring over two squadrons of Sherman tanks to deal with German armor which was running riot against the British infantry.

4

Towards dusk the shelling began to subside. It seemed as if both armies by common consent had paused in their labors of killing each other in order to consume an evening meal before resuming their bloody business. Soldiers left their slit trenches and fox-holes and stopped by ammunition trucks parked around brigade headquarters to chat. The evening sky was clouded with smoke through which the full orb of the moon, at first dusty orange and then cheesy yellow, shone strangely and with momentarily increasing brightness. Now that the din of the guns had ceased, a hush seemed to settle over brigade headquarters, broken only by the voices of conferring officers and the hurried footsteps of messengers. Out of one group limped the tall figure of a battalion commander that I was looking for.

"I hear you're going to put in an attack. I want to go in with you," I said. He looked at me with a startled expression for a moment as if he had seen an unexpected acquaintance from some dim, forgotten past, then laughed and said: "Why not?"

Telling me to jump in his Bren carrier, he drove out from behind the protective cover of a ridge and made across an open plain, past scattered ammunition trucks, past Red Cross lorries, to a small knot of men gathered around a slit trench.

I got out and looked at the scene around me, hypnotized by the open nakedness of everything. It was the same panorama I had seen from the high ground many times before, but now here by the

sea there were no protecting knolls, ridges or bumps, and everything seemed flat and the whole place was full of moving figures half-veiled by smoke clouds and lit not far away by the parabolic curve of ascending and descending flares.

An officer whom I recognized as second in command said to the colonel: "Ronnie was just wounded. An 88 burst above us and broke his arm."

The colonel shook his head; "I don't know what I'll do without him." A shell rang above us and he climbed down into a slit trench. Holding a flash over a map, he explained the situation to his company commanders who lay on their bellies and looked into the hollow of the trench at the map.

"They have recaptured Susan, Mabel and Peggie," the colonel said pointing to three strong points marked in blue on his map. "The situation about Mary is doubtful, but her legs are uncrossed and she'll probably be violated again."

He laughed nervously before continuing.

"The plan is for us to cross the wadi, retake the high ground and go straight on to the new position and hold on. You will shoot two or three hundred yards in front of you.

The colonel paused a moment, passing his hand over his forehead in an unconscious gesture and looking reflectively at a bright yellow flare which was shooting up like a skyrocket into the smoky air over the German lines.

"It may be hard," he said, looking down at the map again, and pausing to think over what he had to say. "There are fifty Jerry tanks on the other side of the wadi."

"We will get the support of nine field regiments." His voice had become quicker and his tone almost cheerful. "They will lay down a creeping barrage that will move forward a hundred feet every three minutes. We must keep under this barrage and mop up as we go. At the far end of the ground, we will halt for ten minutes and the barrage will remain stationary and play down in front of us. After that we will advance. I hope they get that barrage right," he added wistfully.

Abruptly, he straightened his back and he was tall standing there in the middle of the slit trench. "Tell your companies," he said, looking at his company commander lying on the ground beside the trench, "that we will distinguish ourselves magnificently."

Suddenly, his voice became businesslike. "Now is everything

clear? How do you feel about it, Ken?" he said, turning to one of his company commanders.

The man named Ken looked out over the smoky plain for a moment, then turned and looked at the colonel with a strange, half-defiant, half-appealing look on his face. "The men don't feel too good. I've only 60 per cent of my company and we haven't even been in an attack yet."

"I know the men must be taking it hard," said the colonel, "but you can't attack concrete emplacements and not expect casualties. If we push through tonight, we may save a major catastrophe. We've got to do it. It's simple."

With these words of doubtful significance ringing in our ears, and with all of us overcome by an undefined feeling of uncertainty—everyone hoping for the best and expecting the worst—we parted, the colonel going back to brigade headquarters for last-minute instructions, the company commanders returning to their men and I going with a captain named Peter in his Bren-gun carrier.

Our job was to go in with the first infantry attack and then, after we had consolidated our positions, to haul mortars and antitank guns across the wadi. After making a circuit round the whole line of our battalion front, Peter placed our carrier on the back slope of a hill facing the Wadi Zigzaou. A ration truck ran up and down the lines, a soldier standing in the back throwing out haphazardly a can of bully to a group of four men here, a can of peaches to another group there. These the men were to carry across the wadi in case supplies could not be brought over to them on the following day. Peter passed me a half-filled bottle of rum. Standing up, we gulped it down. It warmed.

Snipers' bullets were whining like little birds close overhead. German guns were booming sporadically in the distance, but our artillery was silent. We impatiently waited on the back slope of the hill for the signal to attack. For some reason the signal did not come. Zero hour had been eleven o'clock. The barrage was to start shortly before that. Word came that the attack had been postponed until one o'clock. The delay made us feel even more keenly the menace of the enemy only a few hundred yards away. Hovering there on that borderland that divided the two hostile armies was like standing on a window ledge of a high building waiting to commit suicide. One step forward or one step backward and the thing is over and done with, but it is the waiting that frays tired nerves, starts up

uneasy thought and makes one wonder what is on the other side of that line. One longs to go over that line and find what is there. But the order to attack doesn't come. Soon a vague feeling spreads from soldier to soldier that something is wrong, that someone is making a hash of things. A profound uneasiness grips the troops and soon everyone knows, as well as it is possible to know, that something dreadful is going to happen. No one knows where this feeling comes from, but sometimes it is more certain than definite fact, and it spreads like a secretly sent wireless message from soldier to soldier. It seems that sometimes an army knows when it is going to be beaten.

Gripped by this uneasy feeling, I sat in the carrier. I took two hand grenades and placed them within easy reach on a gasoline tin. Then I lay back in the carrier, seeking to get my head below the metal sides so that stray machine-gun bullets wouldn't hit me. Because I was really tired, I fell asleep.

A resounding crash woke me up. On a dusty track that led up the slope on our left, a procession of infantry was coming. First marched the company commanders; then the men with their helmets glinting slightly in the moonlight and their rifles reversed followed in a column of twos. After them came the ammunition-bearers, weighted down with heavy green boxes, then the stretcher-bearers with the stretchers unfolded as if they expected momentarily to have to carry someone away.

Behind the first group of sixty or seventy men rumbled a Bren-gun carrier, looking like a caterpillar in the moonlight. From it came the sound of voices. "He was shooting at me from a trench, so I jumped over the side of the carrier on top of him and then I . . ."

The voices faded in the distance and the company passed over the slope of the hill and disappeared from sight. Another column came into view and voices shouted from the road. "Are you the Second Battalion?"

"No, we're the Third."

"Where the devil's Company B?" called another voice.

"Information please, information please," cried a wag, and then these voices, too, passed out of hearing range.

A lone Valentine tank went by with infantrymen lying apparently asleep on the decks. Then a single two-pounder antitank gun wound up the slope followed by a Red Cross lorry.

There were very few vehicles. Under the open sky, in the bright glare of the moon the thin column of soldiers advancing with the slow step of a funeral procession appeared pitifully small. Somehow, despite the full light of the moon, the moving figures had a black appearance; their rifles were black, their ammunition boxes were black, even their faces were black. As they went with dead, plodding steps by me and up and out of sight over the slope, I was moved by a feeling of indefinable sympathy, mixed with the thought that in the final analysis it is not planes, or tanks, or guns that bring victory or defeat in battle, but the infantry that go forward and drive the enemy from their positions and open a way for the rest of the army and air force to follow over their bodies.

The column straggled over the slope. The last soldier silhouetted against the moon paused at the top of the hill. Tipping back his head, he held a bottle to his lips. He tipped it all the way up, draining the last drop of "Nelson's blood" out of it. With a gesture he flung the bottle away and vanished on the other side of the hill.

As soon as he had gone, a terrible scream rent the air and a concussion shook the earth. At the same instant I was dazzled by a great flash of flame and immediately a deafening roar, crackling and whistling made my ears ring. Somewhere near me a voice shrieked and I huddled down into the carrier, nearly petrified.

One shell after another whistled by, exploded with an ear-bursting crack on the slope and rattled like hail against near-by vehicles.

Poking my head for a moment above the carrier, I saw dim figures rushing back towards us down the slope, which they a few minutes before had crossed. They hurled themselves on the ground as a shell sang over and then ran and then fell flat again. Somewhere a voice yelled: "Lie down, lie down." Another voice cried: "Aren't you sappers supposed to be up front?"

"No, we're told to come back here," said someone from the ground below me. His words were swallowed up in an explosion.

I lay far back in the carrier, wondering how long I could stand the shelling. With a slight start I noticed my hands had turned a bright yellow. I could see every joint and knuckle with remarkable clarity. I peered over my shoulder and saw that a truck next to us was on fire. I heard someone moan. On the ground a figure was writhing about.

Peter ran to our carrier. "Get going!" he told the driver. The engine backfired, the treads clanked on the ground and we rumbled

up the slope and headed down the other side. We were on our way to the Wadi Zigzaou.

Vaguely alarmed at our forward motion, I had no time to anticipate what we should meet. On going over that slope we entered a new world. In the moonlight and the smoke arising from the furiously crackling guns and exploding shells, everything took on a new shape and assumed a strange, mysterious aspect. Palm trees rose as grotesque, black spears out of milky clouds. Hummocks of ground became the backs of weird animals. Crowds of men, wounded and unwounded with scarcely distinguishable faces, flitted like wraiths through the haze. Some crawled. Some stumbled. Some marched, erect. Some moved forward in a zigzag path.

Over everything was a damp mist, the smell of burning and smoke, and there was a continual, horrible hissing in the air that was not shells, that was not bombs, but some sinister overtone to the whole battle.

Above the haze, green, yellow and red lights popped into the air, leaving white snakes of smoke in the sky. The whole ugly weird, seething panorama was shot through with yellow, violet and red dots of light crossing each other at various points. These were the machine guns.

Over and above the sharp burst of mortars and the deafening roar of exploding artillery shells, the crackle of the machine guns was the most persistent characteristic sound, for here this weapon was still king. Ta-rat ta ra rat. The red string of lights shot over our heads from the rear, and cra-ack, cr-ack, cr-ack, the yellow tracers of the Germans sizzled over our heads from the front.

The mist, the weird shadows cast by the moon, the violet, green and yellow lights popping all around, the damp, unpleasant smell and the cracking, hissing and shrieking explosions—everything was confusion. And this was emphasized by voices crying: "Where's A Company? Where are the carriers to go? Where's battalion headquarters?"

Through this damp fen we plunged slowly onward. Huddled low in the carrier, I saw only red and yellow spurts of light criss-crossing a few yards above my face. I pressed my head back as far as it would go, my face to the sky. A high wall of earth loomed out of the night. The carrier crashed into it, then jerked sideways and crawled through an opening into a narrow earthen corridor. Walls of dirt pressed us in on both sides. I imagined that we

were in the antitank ditch I had heard everyone speak about.

In an open part of the ditch a smashed Red Cross truck was burning. Vehicles were trying to crowd past. They made a grinding, tearing noise as they caught on the edges of the burning truck. Chunks of wood and metal flew off. Sparks from burning splinters sprayed the ditch. Peter jumped out of the carrier and signaled the driver on. He walked ahead on foot, looking for battalion headquarters which was in another carrier.

Abruptly, we jolted to a halt on the edge of a steep gulch. Peter vaulted back into the carrier, breathing heavily. Across the gulch machine guns were dueling with unexampled ferocity. Between the banks glinted water and broken pieces of ground. Flashes of fire sprayed up out of it in all directions; tracer bullets were ricocheting wildly. We were on the brink of the Wadi Zigzaou.

It looked like an infernal death trap. But we couldn't hesitate. It was the only road forward and we took it.

Venturing slowly on, we crept to the lip of the gulch, then plunged downward, dropping through a hail of machine-gun fire. We advanced in slow jerks through a thick adhesive muck and over broken humps of ground. In the smoky, yellow light I made out Indians, with naked backs, hurling great bundles of faggots onto the mud and muck of the half-built vehicle track. There was a great pile of faggots and sticks which someone had dumped in the middle of the wadi, and the Indians were pitching madly into it, trying to make a rude bridge for our tanks to cross. Tracers wove a tapestry of red and yellow thread about their brown backs as they worked. The fire got so thick that they fell flat on their faces. Then those that could got up and ran away. I thought there was nothing that could live long in this seething ditch.

Just then the nose of our carrier reared onto a hump of ground, the tracks spun around futilely and we hung half up in the air, a well-outlined and stationary target for gunners. The driver frantically jerked at his levers, the carrier screwed around sideways and with a crash we broke loose and roared angrily up the opposite slope of the wadi. Under a palm tree we halted. Peter jumped to the ground. A captain from another carrier that had followed behind us ran up, shouting: "Peter, do you think we ought to be here?"

"I don't know," growled Peter. "Everything's a bloody mess. We ought to find battalion headquarters." Both officers disappeared,

leaving the driver, the Bren-gun carrier and me alone, wondering what to do.

Gingerly, I poked my head out to look at our surroundings. The moon was now extraordinarily bright and gradually supernatural things took on a natural appearance. We were in a thin grove of palm trees, on the very bank of the wadi. Among these few trees were crowded a dozen or more Valentine tanks, lying there near the one and only crossing as if they had been forced back by the German counterattack into this narrow space. Beyond the grove was something that looked like a dirt wall and in it what appeared to be niches and slots where figures huddled, crouched and pressed themselves into the wall. Once in a while, these figures ran past us and disappeared down into the wadi and then there was a terrible hail of machine-gun fire.

There seemed to be no one else about. No humans could be discerned around the tanks, the turrets of which were fastened tightly down. It almost appeared as if everyone had fled, leaving behind these grotesque monsters.

All this I gathered in bits and pieces by poking my head up and down above the top of the carrier, but most of the time I kept down, scarcely daring to move. Bullets were literally raining around us. They were crashing through trees, into tanks across the wadi and into the wadi. Above them was the continual crump of mortar bombs and the thrashing crash of 28-mm. shells.

In jerks and halts, our driver edged the nose of the carrier into a palm tree behind a tank. Feeling slightly safer, I stuck my head out again. With a kind of shock I saw a crowd of figures running through the palm trees, falling on their faces, getting up again and then darting over the bank of the wadi and disappearing in the direction from which we had come. A hail of violet and yellow tracer bullets immediately shot into the wadi and sprays of light flashed up where some of them ricocheted.

The sight of these figures hastening toward the rear, the fact that I could see no one in the tanks, and Peter's disappearance aroused a vague dread in me that a retreat was in progress across the wadi. Something was wrong, no doubt. My companions thought so, too. Above the sound of the firing, I caught snatches of words. "Organization. That's the trouble." And then their voices were drowned again.

Soon the driver addressed me: "Sir, I think we ought to be getting

back to the other side. They haven't built a bridgehead, so the tanks can't get across. The counterattack can't come tonight. Don't you think we ought to fight on the other side of the wadi, Sir?"

"I'm only a war correspondent," I said, wishing Peter hadn't so completely vanished. "I wouldn't know. . . ." I did not finish my sentence.

At that moment there was a loud shriek in the air, and a shell crashed into the earth near the carrier, spat out a great sheet of flame and tore up a near-by palm tree, showering us with bark and chunks of wood. At the same instant there dashed out of the gloom on our right another group of figures with backs bent and legs rapidly churning. Like so many rabbits they tore down into the wadi behind us.

Shaken, the three of us clambered out of the carrier and threw ourselves under a near-by tank. We hoped it would not start up and crush us.

The bombardment continued. It soon became a respectable affair. We could not have imagined that the Germans had so many guns. It was cold on the damp earth under the tank and we trembled. But it wasn't the cold that made us tremble. We were pressed close against one another, and we could feel each other's nervousness. It was as if we all had one body and it was a run-down, shaky body. We thanked our good fortune for the cover of the tank overhead and the Bren carrier which stood like a shield in front of the hollow under the tank. After a while when we discovered that we weren't hurt, we didn't mind the shelling so much. We got to mind the uncertainty and confusion then. Where was everyone?

"Why don't they follow us up?" said the driver.

"They don't dare," said the gunner.

"Oh, they'll come!" I said.

We lay there, nervous and irritated. Yes, where were the other battalions? Where were the heavy tanks? And above all, where were the guns? I looked at my watch. It was just one o'clock. Time for our barrage to begin. Nine field regiments, the colonel had said. God, that would bury those Germans!

At quarter after one, there was a musical, singing sound in the air. It came from behind us, grew louder, then became fainter as it passed overhead. There was a dull clatter over in the German positions. It was a beautiful sound. Our barrage had started.

"Those pig-eaters will catch it now," said the driver.

For a full minute the shells sang merrily overhead and burst down on the Germans. Then our guns abruptly ceased. "Come on! Come on! What you waiting for?" growled the driver. Five minutes passed. Ten minutes. Still there were no more shells. By now the German fire was heavier than ever; machine-gun bullets were whizzing up and down the only available crossing. Not a vehicle or a man came over the wadi from the other side.

We huddled farther under the tank. My companions swore. No barrage! No reinforcements! A perfect balls up!

"Well, Sir," said the driver, quoting from a speech of Churchill to the troops, "if you gets out of this one, you can 'tell 'em you marched with the Eighth Army.'"

"Tell 'em you marched under a tank," said the gunner, laughing harshly.

"The United Nations are attacking," said the driver, this time parroting the voice of a radio announcer.

"Where the bloody hell are they attacking?" said the gunner.

"Why, in Burma," said the driver. "Hadn't you heard?"

At this moment two figures staggered up to the tank, one supporting the other. With a little gasp, Peter fell on the ground in front of us.

"Almost castrated me, that one did," he said, achieving a nervous laugh. We helped him under the tank. He had been hit in the leg just below the testicles. There was also blood on his arm from a slighter scratch. The captain with him had a bandage around his head but did not seem so badly hurt as Peter.

Peter kept on laughing. "We're not supposed to be here, you know, but we can't get back now." He seemed to find it very amusing. "Hah! I brought you to a place where you're not supposed to be."

When we had him settled under the tank, he turned to me again. "Did you volunteer to come here?" he asked.

I said: "Yes."

"Do they pay you extra to do this?"

"No."

"You crazy?"

"A little," I admitted.

"You must be," he said. "You couldn't pay me enough to make me come into this bloody business if I didn't have to."

He seemed anxious to keep his mind off his wound by talking. "The colonel's going to put in his attack now," he said. "The barrage will start at one thirty."

I looked at my watch again. It was quarter of two. "Your watch is fast," Peter said.

"No, I set it by brigade time," I said.

"Well, it'll come," said Peter doggedly.

Five minutes later, six or seven shells whistled over from our side of the lines.

"You see . . ." said Peter, but he stopped; for no more shells had come over.

"That's a bloody fine barrage!" growled the gunner.

"Take it easy, mate," said the gunner. "The generals have got to have their tea, now don't they? Now here's someone who is going to tell us all about it."

A lieutenant, emerging from the trees, had come up to the tank under which all of us but the wounded captain were sheltering.

"Where's your radio, Peter?" he asked. "The colonel wants to get through to brigade about this barrage."

"Why, hadn't you heard, Lieutenant?" said the driver, poking his head out from under the tank. "The barrage has been called off so the gunners can get their beauty sleep."

"Oh, hush up," said Peter irritably. "The radio was taken off my carrier before I left," he said to the lieutenant.

"We've got to get through," said the lieutenant. "There are four German tanks sitting on our objective. We can't get them off without artillery."

We thought the tanks must have a radio. So banging on the tank under which we were sheltering, we yelled: "Hey! Open up!" Receiving no answer, we searched for the bell under the exhaust pipe, but nobody answered. If there were a crew inside, it gave no sign. Perhaps they thought we were Germans.

As the lieutenant went away seeking a radio, Peter said to no one in particular: "Something's wrong. This is the first time our artillery failed us."

"Perhaps they don't know where we are?" said the wounded captain. "Perhaps they are afraid of shelling us."

"Oh, they know . . ." said Peter.

He didn't finish; for suddenly out of the smoky darkness three

figures rushed down on us. They were running, bent over low, dodging a line of tracer bullets. One of them was shoving the other two ahead of him and toward us with his bayonet.

"Prisoners," he said. "What'll I do with them?"

"Kill them!" shouted Peter. "Leave them here. I'll kill the bastards myself."

"I wouldn't do that, Peter," said the captain.

The prisoners, seeming to sense Peter's hostility, fell on their knees before us, as if begging for their lives.

The soldier with the rifle had now gone. For the moment we had crawled out from the tank. Peter, who seemed to be growing weaker, had taken out his pistol and was waving it at the prisoners. One was thin and weak-looking and his arm was in a dirty bandage, but the other was huge—almost six feet three—with an oxlike look, imploring pity, on his face.

With a wounded officer, and the rest of us unarmed at the moment, it would not have been a difficult matter for him to make a quick grab for Peter's pistol and overpower us. I started to search him.

"Feel under his balls for hand grenades," said Peter; "they're tricky bastards."

Kneeling face to face with this young fellow, seeing his hands held up in the air in a helpless gesture, watching his eyes looking imploringly at me, hearing his little moans and grunts by which he tried to tell me he was unarmed, ducking to earth with him as a shell crashed near by and going through his clothing and finding nothing but a bandage dressing and a few crumpled cigarettes, I suddenly felt overcome by an ineffable weariness and a desire to weep. I could picture this fellow lying on the other side of the lines as we were lying under our tank, hoping a bullet wouldn't hit him and taking a crumpled cigarette out of his pocket as we took crumpled cigarettes out of our pockets and puffed on them to take our minds off the fighting and to soothe shattered nerves.

While they were kneeling there, trembling before us, a British soldier scampered up and announced he was going to cross back over the wadi.

"Can you get across?" asked the captain from the other Bren carrier.

"Been back and forth across that Wadi Zigzag twenty times," said the soldier.

"Good boy," said Peter, "can you take these prisoners with you?"

"Sure."

"Got a gun?"

"No, I don't need one. They'll come with me."

The soldier turned to the prisoners. "Come on, chums," he said, making a menacing gesture; and the two Germans, keeping their eyes on Peter's pistol, got to their feet, and then ran—almost happily, it seemed—with the British soldier down into the gulch. A string of tracers shot angrily after them.

The lieutenant who had gone in search of a radio returned and announced that his message had been successfully transmitted to brigade. "The barrage will come down at two forty-five," he said with the assured air of one who is imparting welcome news.

As if in mockery, a cluster of German shells howled down on us again. We went back under the tank. There we discussed the situation. The lieutenant had been in touch with the brigade. That was definite enough. The barrage would surely come this time. But two forty-five came and passed. Then three o'clock. Then three thirty. Disappointment mounted, then gave way to rage; and at last rage gave way to despair. Then we talked and we decided several things. First of all, we decided our luck was bad; then we decided there wouldn't be any barrage; but such being the case and since we had no orders to go back, we would stay where we were under the tank until help came. Then when that happened, we would take our carrier and go back and fetch mortars and antitank guns and blast the Germans out of the Mareth Line.

When we had decided that we were all a lot of forsaken heroes and when we had determined to hang on where we were, there abruptly came to us the sound of rumbling in the tank overhead: the motor had started. Hastily, we crawled out from under it to save ourselves from being crushed.

There were several frightful explosions over our heads. We were caught unaware. We had barely time to run around on the far side of the Bren-gun carrier and take shelter against its side.

The bombardment was heavy now. I found a spade and hollowed out the earth around Peter. I dug in and around and under him and made him slide down. He was becoming slightly dazed and he had begun to call me Bill.

"Bill," he said, as I started to deepen his hole, "didn't you say you were in China?"

"That's right."

"Then you're used to this sort of thing. Shells and bombs and all that."

"Well, I haven't been in China for over a year, you know."

"Sort of forgot how it felt, huh?"

"Yup, sort of forgot."

"How does it feel?"

"Bad."

"Now, you're laying it on, Bill. You Americans can take it. Isn't that what the gangsters say: 'I can take it'?"

"I'm not a gangster. I'm just a college boy."

"Say, Bill, do you think I'm dying?"

"Of course not."

"Then what are you trying to bury me under all this dirt for?"

He laughed loudly, his head thrown back. I looked at him and realized he had been kidding me and kidding himself to keep going.

Peter wouldn't leave the front in his carrier because he thought it might be needed at any moment. It was almost impossible at the time for a wounded man to get back across the wadi in any other way.

In front of us now litter-bearers were bringing back wounded and laying them out on the bank of the wadi. Some were loaded onto Bren-gun carriers which immediately disappeared into the ditch followed by a hail of tracers. Soon all the carriers were gone. Still the wounded continued to arrive. Bearers carried them up to the brink of the wadi and some tried to go down into the wadi. Converging streams of tracers always drove them back.

The wounded were lying directly in front of us. Two streaks of molten light from opposite directions spurted across them. In the smoky light we saw their bodies restlessly turn. The bearers tried once more to take them to the wadi crossing. Two men, with their burden swaying between them, walked slowly and erect toward the bank. Again the crossing was enfiladed by fire. Like an animal that has touched something hot, the bearers shrank back. One of them stumbled and went to his knees but by great effort managed to hold the stretcher level. Then he got to his feet, and they carried the wounded man behind the shelter of a tank.

A soldier came to us, saying: "Can you spare a blanket for the wounded?" In the carrier we found something.

"Nothing can get across that wadi on foot now," said the soldier

apologetically, "and the wounded will get cold lying here, you know."

Shortly after four o'clock an officer came to our hole. "I'm going to make a dash back for it before it is too light," he said.

"I'm going to stay here with the carrier for a while," said Peter.

"I'll go with you," I said.

As we got up to go, Peter was already falling asleep in his hole. He had not had any sleep in sixty hours. I threw him a look of sympathy as we darted out toward the wadi.

Up spurted the inevitable stream of tracers. There was no time for hesitation. We plunged swiftly over the bank and down onto the track crossing.

I could hear machine guns firing but could see no tracers now. They have not seen us or don't care, I thought.

I slowed to a walk and went forward more calmly. The officer who had been with me was nowhere to be seen. I noticed with a sense of curious detachment that the water by my side was spurting up in scores of little jets. Good God! Bullets!

I leaped forward, ran some twenty steps, fell flat upon the ground and leaped up once more. Head bent down, I plunged forward. Bullets sang and hissed about me. Every moment I expected one to strike. I stumbled on, wandering off the track, slipping in the water and getting up again. At last, I reached the opposite slope. I ran up it feeling I was running out of hell into heaven.

There seemed to be a buzzing sound overhead. A bright yellow flare hung gaily in the sky. I heard the bombs *thrushing* down and I staggered into a shell hole, sheltering there until the bombs had burst and I no longer could hear the plane.

Shortly before dawn I stumbled up to brigade headquarters. There something gave me pause and made me stop still and listen.

Plainly I could hear them. In great numbers, like a flock of Pei-ping pigeons with whistles tied to their tails, shells were singing toward the German lines. At last, the long-awaited barrage had started.

Too late! I thought bitterly.

5

With heavy casualties the British infantry fell back across the Wadi Zigzaou, and the Germans swarmed into their old positions. Montgomery's attack on the Mareth Line had failed.

The amazing luck which had followed the little Irish commander ever since as an unknown lieutenant-general he had taken command of the Eighth Army at Alamein seemed on the morning of March 23 suddenly, if momentarily, to have deserted him.

Montgomery that day found himself in the unenviable position of a poker-player who, having placed a large part of his bank roll on a flush and lost to a full house, suddenly decides to gain back his losses by betting all his money on three of a kind, hoping that his opponent has only two pairs. Having lost heavily in backing what had appeared his best bet on the right flank, Montgomery now decided to recoup his fortunes by heavily reinforcing his left flank.

The morning he received the news of the failure at the Mareth Line, Montgomery, acting on a new plan, sent Lieutenant-General B. G. Horrocks, commander of the Tenth Corps, with the First Armored Division, 150 tanks strong, to the south around the hills along the trail that Freyberg and his New Zealanders had already blazed across the desert. Horrocks was to make this march without resting, overtake the New Zealanders and, with them, as circumstances dictated, break through with all dispatch on Rommel's north, west and rear and, if possible, seize Gabes before the German general could evacuate from the Mareth Line. Montgomery himself remained before Mareth with the rest of the army and at the same time sent individual units on an inner flanking movement through the Matmata Hills to pin the enemy down and prevent him from hindering the wide sweep around the Matmatas.

Moving south on the afternoon of the twenty-third of March, and at nightfall passing the fort town of Foum Talahouine, where a curfew order had confined the inhabitants to their homes so that they could not see his move, Horrocks on the morning of the twenty-fourth came out on the edge of the desert, debarked his tanks from their twenty-four-wheeled transport lorries and struck across the sand in battle formation. Scout cars first, swarming over the high ground and reconnoitering, followed by light Honey tanks, then heavy Shermans and Grants and finally guns and supply trucks—all moving in five or six parallel columns, raising clouds of dust and following the tracks made by Freyberg before them.

Horrocks had to go nearly 150 miles over roadless, waterless desert to catch the New Zealanders and attack the slender German and Italian units waiting for them. Rommel, on the other hand, operat-

ing on interior lines of communication, had to move the Fifteenth Panzer Division only half that distance from the Mareth Line to parry the threat and place himself athwart Horrocks' road. On the face of it, it seemed impossible to get to his new position before Rommel.

Yet several factors were operating in Horrocks' favor. Firstly, the costly but determined attacks of the Fiftieth Division on the Mareth Line near the sea so deeply engaged Rommel and his armor that he could not break off quickly enough to meet the new threat. Secondly, Montgomery's decision to abandon the attack on Mareth and make his main move on the left flank was taken with such extraordinary dispatch that no time was wasted in planning and Horrocks was able to depart immediately and in secret. Thirdly, the prior outflanking move of Freyberg's New Zealanders was carried out with such effectiveness that Horrocks could follow an already blazed trail, cleared of enemy patrols. And fourthly, the Italians, without decently prepared positions, had no stomach for a fight in the desert, and hundreds voluntarily surrendered to Freyberg, again making Horrocks' path easier.

On March 26, Horrocks with his 150 tanks of the First Armored Division and self-propelled 105-mm. guns caught up with the New Zealanders who were held up by strong prepared enemy positions in a two-mile gap between two ranges of hills known as the Jebel Tabaga and the Jebel Melab, thirty-five miles from Gabes. Finding himself opposed only by the Twenty-first Panzer Division and some Italians, Horrocks decided to attack that night toward the oasis town of El Hamma on the edge of the desert and break through in one blow to Gabes, twenty miles beyond and in the rear of Rommel in the Mareth Line. This attack was originally to have been supported by the biggest Allied air offensive of the African War, but a violent sandstorm, grounding American and British planes in Tunisia, Algeria and Tripolitania, severely cut down the scale of air help that could be sent. Nevertheless, Horrocks pushed forward with his attack, for time was now the biggest factor in the situation.

At four o'clock in the afternoon, New Zealand infantry, led by a spearhead of knife-wielding Maoris, who repulsed the first bayonet attack German infantry has ever dared launch against them, broke through the Melab gap and by nightfall had penetrated 4,000 yards into the enemy's position. Desiring at all costs to break through be-

fore Rommel could reinforce his position or escape from the Mareth Line, Horrocks quickly decided to shove his whole armored division through the breach.

Near eleven o'clock as a dim moon rose on the east over Jebel Melab, he sent his tanks out on what has been called the first mass tank attack at night in military history. The fact that New Zealand infantry were already in the enemy lines made Horrocks feel sure that his tanks would meet no mines.

His daring was promptly rewarded. Grant and Sherman tanks swarmed over the enemy position and swept by field guns that in daylight would have knocked them out, but that now, in the dim light, discovered tanks rushing at them from the side when it was too late to turn their guns around.

Horrocks' success was so quick that by daylight of the twenty-seventh his whole armored division had gone through the enemy's defensive positions and swept up to within five miles of Hamma with a clear road beyond to Gabes, the capture of which at that time would have signified the trapping of Rommel's main force.

By a queer fluke of the battle, however, the very speed of Horrocks' success prevented him from reaching the main objective at Gabes. In swarming through the German positions at night he had unknowingly by-passed fifty German tanks, and these now swung in on his rear. Horrocks could perhaps have ignored this interruption and swept on toward Hamma and Gabes, but such a move would have laid his New Zealand infantry in the rear open to serious damage and, unwilling to take this chance, he paused in his forward sweep to fight the German tanks.

The delay in the British advance caused by this move was the saving of Rommel. In gaining two hours' grace, he was able to get 88-mm. guns, which he had transferred with units of his Fifteenth Panzer Division, from the Mareth Line into Hamma. With these for two days he held off Horrocks, who could not get ammunition up fast enough for a prolonged struggle. Those two days saved the German and Italian troops in the Mareth Line. Realizing that he could not hold off Horrocks and Freyberg for long, Rommel, on March 28, voluntarily abandoned the Mareth Line and withdrew swiftly and in orderly fashion through Gabes with his main force intact.

Once more, as he had repeatedly done for 1,500 miles across Africa, Rommel had escaped Montgomery's trap.

AMERICAN BATTLEFIELDS

Chapter VI

The Landing at Sicily

"Usually before we have learned what danger really is, we form an idea of it which is more attractive than repulsive. In the intoxication of enthusiasm to fall upon the enemy at the charge, who cares then about bullets and men falling? To hurl ourselves, with eyes a few moments shut, into the chill face of death, uncertain whether we or others shall escape him, and all this close on the golden goal of victory, close to the refreshing fruit for which ambition thirsts—can this be difficult? It will not be difficult, and still less will it appear so. But such moments, which, however, are not the work of a single pulse-beat, as they are supposed to be, but rather, like doctors' draughts, must be taken diluted and spoiled by time—such moments, we say, are but few."

—VON CLAUSEWITZ

I

IT WAS the hour of twilight on July 9, 1943, and I stood with legs spread apart on the swaying deck of the U.S.S. "Barnett" and looked out across the Mediterranean. My eyes filled with the dark mass of the frothing water, its sibilant surging swells, the soaring green waves flecked white at their summits. The sea ahead of me was an undulating, dappled path, where heavy transports, dripping and rolling, chased one another in a wavering battle column. On the rest of the sea, thousands of warships of the British and American Navies, swaying in sinuous and menacing lines, ploughed deeply through the water and showed now their rising, pulsating bows and now the tops of their spray-clouded masts.

The air was boisterous with a leashed-in kind of wildness. All the noises of the sea and sky were humming as if they would break out

at any moment into a violent, uncontrollable roar. The wind whistled through the superstructure with crazy laughter, the broken clouds scampered across the heavens in flight and the U.S.S. "Barnett" lurched, plunged, rolled and groaned across the sea which rose in green waves over the forecastle and splashed with a loud slapping sound on the upper deck where I stood.

As I groped unsteadily along the deck to the rail, a nameless sinking feeling welled within me and I looked with emotions of scared pity at the fleet of tiny landing craft which every now and then emerged shaking from the sea beside us and then disappeared from sight beneath a fresh mountain of angry water. Turning from the sea, I saw below me soldiers clinging to stanchions, holding onto ladders, and far off on the poop deck men were bending over rails with their faces toward the water. Even in the distance the faces seemed tense and greenish, and the bodies of the men beneath the uniforms appeared limp and sodden. Suddenly, below me on the deck I noticed a stir among the forlorn figures. Then beside me a voice yelled: "Jesus! There's a man overboard." Along with a group of army and navy officers and men on the top deck I rushed for the port rail and examined the dark, angry waters for the sign of a human body.

"There he is!" yelled a voice. We followed his pointing finger down across the peaks of a wave into a great, yawning, cavernous hollow, and there, like a blemish on the somber green carpet of the waters, we saw a spot of white, and we guessed that was a life belt. Then the deck beneath us quavered and the "Barnett" rose in the air, shuddered for an instant, then plunged forward and down in a sickening descent, while a swirling mass of water swept by abeam and shut out that jostling blob of white from our line of vision. Now the "Barnett" settled down once more in the trough of the sea; again we made out that speck of white whirling on the waters, and this time we saw, too, the dark blob of a man's head. Immediately, the sea came galloping past in a long stride and the blobs of white and black were swept far astern until we could no longer distinguish anything but the broad wake made by the "Barnett's" propellers and the great, rolling, heaving transports following in her path.

We were heading around Malta on our way to assault the Italian island of Sicily, and our great invasion fleet, beset by storm and wind, had no time to pause and pick up this nameless atom that had so suddenly, so silently, so helplessly fallen into the Mediterranean.

Yet the men on the "Barnett" with hypnotic concentration examined the rough, torn face of the sea where that head had last been seen. Their eyes traveled backward slowly. The sea grew curiously, seemed to widen and lengthen tremendously till the enormous, unutterable vastness of it overwhelmed the spirit of the watchers and made their eyes grow faint with staring. Still the eyes continued on back, wave over wave, seeking in all that limitless desert of water to find a tiny, nameless speck that a few moments before had been a living, breathing soldier, perhaps a machine gunner or a company cook or a veteran sergeant on whom a platoon commander was leaning all his dependence for the coming battle. And so the men continued looking back, searching the waves for this unknown atom, till at last their eyes reached the gray, bleak horizon, and beyond that they could not go; for the horizon halted all, stopped all and still it gave them no answer: What happened to the "crazy little guy"? After staring fixedly at the horizon and once or twice licking their lips, the men brought their eyes slowly back again across the waves, but this time they were no longer searching for any mark, sign or token, but were brooding at the immensity of the sea, perhaps trying to fathom how this fleet—"the greatest amphibious force in history"—could have once seemed so indestructible or so important, or how they, tiny, unknown, molecules of that fleet, could any longer trumpet their significance in the face of this—this ship-consuming, body-drowning, spirit-engulfing, immense maw of water.

It was too much. It was too hard. We turned away with nausea, hollowness, impotence.

The eyes of the men at the rail met those of their companions. And what one man saw in the eyes of another, he knew reflected his own feelings and he tried to mask them with a macabre show of bravery. "Jesus!" one hoarsely whispered. "To jump overboard at a time like this a guy must be yellow!"

Another, more sympathetically: "Nah! A guy if he was yellow woodn' jump overboard. He was probably pukin' over the side and fell in."

And others, with their sick eyes darting back every now and then to the sea: "But Christ! Couldn't they pick him up?"

A major, turning away and moving toward the companionway with a savage air: "Do you think this fleet's a taxi? If a guy wants to get off here before we get to Sicily, that's his own lookout."

Then as the crowd began to draw away from the rail, a soldier

turned to his companion with a casual indifference: "Oh, well! He probably would have got it on the beach anyway, I guess."

Quietly now the crowd dispersed. The evening was growing darker and almost everyone went below, the officers for a last-minute conference, the soldiers to try to get some sleep that likely as not would never come. Only the naval officers and men on watch remained on the upper deck.

As the westering light faded, it seemed to me that the darkness lent a sinister cloak to the sea. With the passing hours it appeared to grow wilder. Under other circumstances, I might have found the night thrilling and the sea strangely beautiful. But now to me, who was thinking that we would have to launch boats on this sea toward a hostile shore, the crashing of the Mediterranean and the howling of the wind seemed appalling. It was bitter to think that after four days of what Captain Maynard, skipper of the "Barnett," had called a "Mediterranean cruise," this sea should rise up out of nowhere and threaten with destruction our landing boats if we should dare launch them toward the shores of Sicily. It had all happened so suddenly, without warning, and when we were in the midst of the greatest calm, and almost without a care in the world.

For four idyllic days, the Mediterranean had exhibited all her fabled, summer-time charms, with the blue ocean carpet scarcely once wrinkled by an untoward wave. Across her serene and friendly waters, from Casablanca in the west and Alexandria in the east, from Tripoli in the south and Malta in the north, had sailed a combined British and American fleet of 3,000 ships, swarming with 150,000 men, nearly 1,000 tanks and many times that number of guns, rifles and vehicles, and all of these—ships, tanks, guns and men—had, without accident, without a single error, without an air raid or a submarine attack, met, coalesced and formed into one gigantic unit to attack the Italian island of Sicily. In the faultless unfolding of the plan and in the unrolling of one calm day after another, it had seemed as if some supernatural force were smiling on our venture.

Under these special circumstances the very perfection of the weather and of our plans alike had been conducive to an increase in the confidence of our spirits. The soldiers, informally stripped to their undershirts for comfort's sake, had gathered a platoon at a time on the sun-splattered top deck, and there, with the quiet air of students, they had examined the relief model of the town of Gela, which they were to assault, and none of them had betrayed the

slightest nervous tension. Everyone had been in cheerful spirits, acting more like tourists going on an excursion to a foreign land than soldiers preparing to assault a hostile shore. Oh, there might have been private soul-searchings in the hold below between a soldier and his buddy, and there had been serious conversations such as those held by Brigadier-General Theodore Roosevelt, Jr. and me in his cabin at night, when, with solemn faces, we had declared that the failure of our invasion would be a fatal blow from which the American people, desiring action against Japan and not Germany, might never recover. But this kind of talk had been only a kind of spitting on our luck to keep it clean, and none of us had been able clearly to conjure up a picture of defeat. In the calmness of the sea everyone undoubtedly had found a sedative for whatever turbulence lurked in his spirit. Briefly, we had been at peace.

But then at noon on this day of July 9, the very eve of our invasion, a fresh breeze had sprung out of the north, swung around to the west, sharpened into a blow and at last, toward the middle of the afternoon, had lashed the sea into a froth. The azure blue of the water had turned a deeper hue; the rhythmic, rippling swells had broken up into choppy, heavy waves, and the whole sea, mounting higher and higher, had at last assaulted our fleet, rocking the transports from side to side, crashing down with angry venom over our low-slung destroyers and all but swallowing the small tank-landing craft.

Because the sea, right up until the moment when we had turned toward Sicily, had been so calm, it seemed now, when it had turned rough, as if we had been lured into a trap. The appearance of that wind out of nowhere had made us feel as Odysseus must have felt, when 3,000 years before us, perhaps on this same spot, his sailors had loosed the winds of Aeolus and driven him from his sighted goal; that is, we felt the gods were against us, and we said the wind,—this wind that had come from the north, had come from Rome itself, and we called it “Mussolini wind.”

In spite of the colorings of cheer that had tinged the whole voyage up to now, the men were plunged into a deep gloom. As the sea grew higher and wilder, the men grew paler and more ill, sought the stillness of their bunks, where they lay miserably sighing to themselves, or came up on deck and vomited over the rail, and went down below and were sick again, too weary to stir.

Taking their mood from the state of their stomachs, they gradu-

ally became sick with anxiety and doubt. They despaired in the new and angry face of the sea. The old cheerfulness had gone out of them, and hour after hour they were enervated by the gloomy thought that they were no longer in control of their destiny. From the time this thought took root and began like a slow poison to pervade the ship, there had developed—as if the men desired to win back control over their fate—the counterthought that it would be foolhardy to go ahead with the plans for invasion.

Down between-decks fore and aft, where the motion of the ship was more violent, the common soldier had been too sick to give utterance to his thoughts, but his face clearly betrayed what he was thinking. Amidships on the saloon deck, where the ship maintained a comparative equilibrium, the officer, with more stable belly, however, had openly vented his feelings.

In that tone of hoarse irritation that a man uses when he is trying to convince not only his listener but himself, one officer had said to another: "It's goddam foolish, I tell you. What's the use of going ahead with the invasion when your boats aren't even going to reach shore?"

And a captain had said to me: "It's not fear. No, goddamit! It's not fear. There's just no sense in risking the whole invasion in this sea."

Later, the commander of our transports, with a slow, subtle smile, had said: "Even if we can land them, the soldiers will be too sick to fight."

Anyone is afraid who suddenly meets the unexpected and the unknown at the very moment when he is going out on a dangerous mission, and in that way the soldiers aboard the "Barnett" had become afraid. And, like most of us, when things suddenly go sour, they blamed their new-found lack of enthusiasm wholly on something outside themselves. It was not seasickness or fear that made the invasion no longer feasible, but merely the blind confluence of misfortune. Nevertheless, the men soon began to realize that more than misfortune and a storm was required to postpone the invasion. Something told them that they were part of an already-begun drama and they had to play it through to the end.

The Sicily operation was so vast and complicated, dependent on the interaction of so many different forces, and was coordinated with so many geographic places and time elements that the invasion could not be called off at this late hour without throwing the British and

American Armies and Navies into a chaos and confusion from which they might not be able to recover for months. So, though all of us voiced the desire that the invasion be postponed, yet within us we knew that it could not be delayed.

Within this emotional trap we all had struggled vainly, and no one had been able to see a way out. For a while we had clung to the hope (sponsored by the naval officers) that when the sun went down, the sea would grow calmer. But that had not happened. The sea, instead of growing quieter under the cover of night, had grown more boisterous. And, to cap it all, at the worst psychological moment, the sick and half-scared soldiers had seen that lost body tossing helplessly in the Mediterranean. That had been too much. A blind, hollow feeling of impotence had gripped us all.

But men can't live on hollowness alone for long. Those who wait on the threshold of battle must, because of the very futility of their waiting, clutch at straws of hope to tide them over the nerve-consuming period of predanger. So now, since there was no other source, the men wrested a last gleam of hope out of the very storm itself. If the sea was so rough, they now began to tell themselves, and if the wind were howling this way round Sicily, why then—if this were so—then no one on the island would expect us from the middle of the storm to launch an invasion on the beaches. And if this were so, we would swoop down on the enemy, take him by surprise and get our boats ashore before he had a chance to fire on us.

That was the way it was now. Many soldiers found cause for near exultation in the fact of the storm. They, and I, too, were buoyed up by the belief—not by any means a new one; for that was what we had always planned, only now the feeling was stronger—that now we stood a glorious chance of catching the enemy completely unaware, perhaps while he was still asleep in his bed.

So it was with this sense of bolstered confidence that in the middle of the night of July 9, 1943, I went below to my bunk to wait for the signal to launch our boats against unsuspecting Sicily.

2

Shortly before midnight, there was a confused stir of voices and moving figures outside my door, and I got out of bed and climbed upward through the black recesses of the ship and went outside on the cool upper deck.

As I made my way toward the rail, the deck beneath my feet seemed steadier than it had been, and silently I was thankful. Reaching the rail, I noted that we were no longer under way. This must be the transport area where we launch our boats, I thought.

I looked about me. On every side, rolling suggestively on the white-capped sea, loomed hundreds of ships of our fleet. Round and about the ships, wrapping all the grim hulks in a kind of light, transparent, filmy gauze, hung suspended a fine mist, which the rays of a quarter moon crossed and caused dully to gleam. In this light the ships formed a ghostly and a menacing company. And they rode up and down silently, huddled together like conspirators in the night plotting some crime. Could they have been seen by a watcher on the shore, I thought, they would have made a terrifying, soul-shaking sight.

At first, I could see nothing of that shore, which I thought must be near at hand, but gradually, as the ship swung around, I made out a faint glow in the sky off the starboard bow, and then, as the ship continued turning, there abruptly burst into view a long line of brilliant orange and yellow lights. At this unexpected sight the crowd by the rail drew in its breath with a sharp intake of excitement, and an involuntary shudder ran through the group, communicating itself to every man.

I gripped the rail hard, staring with fascination at what I saw. The ship had stopped swinging now so that we could focus our eyes with undiminished attention on those strange lights there off the beam. I could not fathom what they were or understand what I was looking at. I fancied that a whole city was floating there in electrical brilliance on the edge of the blackness where the sea ended, and then I thought, having noted with puzzled alarm that the lights extended for a good distance in several directions, that highways leading to the city must also be illuminated.

Everyone gazed at the lights in perfect silence. Before long, a fountain of red spray showered up out of the blackness at the edge of the sea. The sky was laced and crisscrossed everywhere with bewildering skeins of red pellets, and they chased each other through the upper blackness. These, I knew, were ack-ack tracers. So now the mystery of the big yellow lights was solved: they must be fires that our planes had started.

As yet, few people seemed to comprehend the significance of those flames on the shore. For the most part they were either bewil-

dered and confused or curious and excited. Only now an occasional soldier betrayed alarm over the danger to us which that brilliantly lit shore line seemed to forecast.

Such a one now spoke out of the moonlit gloom by the rail.

"Damn! . . . damn!" he softly swore. "Those bombers done gone and waked him up. Sure ain't going to be healthy going in there tonight."

For a moment nobody said a word. Then someone at the rail noticed something and pointed at it. A murmur ran through the crowd and all eyes were turned searching toward the left. There, seemingly much nearer than the fires, was a light flashing on and off.

"Jesus! A searchlight!" someone whispered in a tone of unbelief.

As we watched, the light came on again and this time a narrow white furrow shone on the waters far off to the left. Before very long the furrow increased to a wide streak, and suddenly a blue, white shaft shot across the waves and fastened on our fleet. With one gigantic sweeping motion that streak of light shot toward the "Barnett," and involuntarily I ducked as it swept overhead. Going from one ship to another, the light paused at each one, and, like something human, it seemed to say: "I see you! And you! And you!"

"God! They got us taped!" The voice that said those words was choked with wondering awe.

That was the way I felt, too, and I could not take my eyes off that forbidding shore. The prospect was more weird and sinister than any I had ever seen. I could not believe that we would have to launch our boats across this heavy sea toward that bursting flaming shore. I had always thought of a landing as something adventure-some and dangerous, but never had I imagined that the enemy would be waiting for us like this. Even the atmosphere of the night was conducive to an increase of fear. The choppy sea was splashing angrily, the wind was howling, and the moon was driving in and out of the clouds, intermittently spangling the billowing mass of angry waves with a golden gleam.

I began to feel that if I looked at that shore any longer, I would go crazy. So I left the rail and groped my way down to the wardroom where I knew our officers would be gathering for coffee and sandwiches before going ashore.

Alive with anxiety now, and fascinated by the danger which those shore lights had brought sharply home to all of us, I began to look



about me at the officers in the wardroom. I saw that there were many who were quite afraid.

That captain there, for instance! With his pasty face and rolling eyes, and high-pitched voice that joked just a little too self-consciously—could there be any doubt at all that he was on edge with nervousness and fear? I knew that soldiers of this fellow's type were indigenous to every military unit, being regarded tenderly as a privileged clown. Why was it? Was it something in the tense spirit of every soldier prior to a battle that made them pay court to these jesters? There he was now, walking about the tables, clapping on the backs men who were trying to sober up their heaving, seasick stomachs with black coffee, and saying in an owlish tone:

"Don't look goo—d, Joe. Don't look goooo—d!"

The effect of this on some of the men was so irresistible that they spluttered and guffawed. But other men bit their lips and jerked away as they felt the clown's hand fall on their shoulders.

And that lieutenant over there in the corner beneath the wardroom clock, reading a pocket Bible with an intent stare on his face—a scared boy if ever I saw one.

But what I noticed chiefly was that almost everyone was lightening his load. Some were taking off their extra water canteens; some were splitting open their rations, taking out the cans and throwing away the cardboard boxes, and almost all were surreptitiously examining their life belts.

At these repeated signs of fear in a division which was supposed to be the best in the American Army, I began to doubt the wisdom of accompanying the assault waves. Then I saw Walter Grant, commander of the Second Battalion in whose boat I was scheduled to go, walking cheerfully among his soldiers, laughing and saying: "Now they see us, we can't surprise them, but maybe we'll scare them to death," and suddenly, with a prick of conscience, I thought about myself. Who was I to criticize? Were we not all afraid? Was there not something to be afraid of?

Yes, all these officers had a right to be frightened. There could be no question that they had more right than anyone else. They had been through the mill for six months in Africa and they knew what they were about to face.

Was not the regiment commander, Johnny Bowen, a skilled technician and a cool, resourceful leader? Yes. Had he not been baptized in defeat at Kasserine, and in victory at Hill 609? Why then, if he

was nervous, it was only just and proper that he should be. And as for the others, did they not know what they were about? Teddy Roosevelt, with his red florid face, his walking stick and a pat on the back and a corny word of encouragement for every soldier, had he not been in the last war, gone to Europe with the very same twenty-sixth infantry regiment of the very same First Infantry Division with which now twenty-six years later he was returning to Europe? And Commodore Edgar, in charge of our fleet of transports, the calmest man aboard the "Barnett," had he not been at Guadalcanal, Casablanca and on convoy in the Mediterranean and the Pacific, and did he not know the dangers of landing on a hostile shore as well as anyone could?

As for the others, not one of them had ever made a flag of his courage and said: "I am not afraid." When the sea had come up, their stomachs had turned uneasy. When the lights out there on the shore had shone to seaward, they had become tense. They had written letters to their families, gone to a last Catholic mass or a Protestant service, and now they all were afraid.

And why not? As I thought about it, I felt that all these limp, sodden, seasick soldiers in the hold of the ship, all these young imaginative officers in the wardroom, in the secret and buried recesses of their souls were feeding on a common fear, and wringing from their specialized knowledge and experience a way to meet that fear. The whole issue of their lives, I felt, their months of training in American Army camps, their battle baptism in Africa, their secret night landings in preparation for the Sicilian invasion, all that they ever were and hoped to be now hung in the balance as they waited before this hostile shore.

There it was. That forbidding, grim shore held the answer. Could any private, major or general, with the slightest spark of imagination, look upon that shore without being burdened down with almost stupefying fear? Could anyone see those glaring, probing searchlights and not feel almost naked, stripped of even the protective cover of darkness? Was it possible to look on those burnings and explosions and not feel an agony of doubt? Was it not true that the enemy, now that he knew we were here, might conceivably wreck our boats with well-placed fire even before we set foot on land? Was it not possible that we might never know the feel of solid land again? That we might be struck between the ship and the shore and drown without anyone being the wiser where we

were? Or if our bodies were found, would anyone find a semblance of us in the bloated hulks that were washed up on the shores days later? And suppose that through the lights and the storm of bullets and shells that must be waiting for us, we safely beached our boats and stepped out on dry land. Suppose we had that good luck. What then? In the blackness of the night, not daring to flash a light, would we see the mine or the booby trap on the beach before our plunging feet tripped on the catch wire and sent us in bits of torn and exploded flesh to our doom?

Those were the dangers and they were real enough. They were, I knew, no phantoms of scared and panic-stricken minds. Had it not happened over and over again through all the bloodied centuries of warfare? Think of all the young men, the very best, the most healthy and the brave, who had gone out on some promise of conquest or for some imagined cause, and then had died while grasping at the prize which nevermore could be theirs. Would we be different from scores of others that had assailed hostile shores and been driven back nameless into the sea? Different from the Athenian soldiers who 2,300 years before us had in their pride and ignorance assaulted Sicily and been driven back into the sea so that the civilization of Greece was never more the same? Or different from the Spanish Armada, wrecked by a wind, just such a wind as had now come up when we were about to land? Or different from those modern fools who had burst their boats and bodies against the ramparts of Gallipoli? If that had happened to centuries of warriors before us, could it now not happen to us? And were not the men right, then, to be afraid?

Yes. They were right, so very, very right that I derived a kind of exhilaration in discovering the correctness of their fear. I no longer saw any cause for doubting their ability because of the way they felt. It was just that they should be scared and I was glad that they were that way. I was glad to see them testing their knowledge against their fear, lightening their loads for the dash to the beach, inspecting every bit of their equipment. A healthy fear meant preparedness. And preparedness meant a better chance to live. So it was good that these men were afraid.

But even in the instant that I realized this, I was overwhelmed with a sudden sense of sad futility. Was there, then, in all this war—in this most uncertain of war's operations—a landing on a hostile shore—no joy at going into battle, no simple truth to bolster up your

courage? Must one always be eaten up with doubt? For many long years, in the backwoods and mountains of China, in the jungles of Burma and the deserts of Egypt, I had envisioned such a moment as this when we would begin the grand assault on the enemy's stronghold and start him hurtling down to the ruin that would bring us peace. But now, in the very moment of the "dream come true," with, for the first time, my own countrymen by my side—now where was the exhilaration, the glory or the triumph?

It was all so different from the way I once had thought it would be—and all at once I was overcome, not with a physical fear, but with the terror of the knowledge that on that waiting shore there was nothing but a yawning, empty void and not a single thing I wanted.

3

"Go to your debarkation stations."

The voice on the loud-speaker rang with a harsh metallic note through the wardroom.

The men sat up and blinked their eyes, and for a moment all of them stared at each other with expressions that seemed to say: "This is it." Then a few of them broke out in foolish grins and rose slowly from their chairs.

"All right, let's go, gang! Let's go!" called Major Grant in a brisk voice. He got up and strode down the wardroom, a tiny bundle of energy, and the others slowly followed after him, their heads bent toward the deck as if they were thinking.

It was pitch-dark in the passageways. In the inky blackness men stumbled against each other, but no one uttered a word. In silence we made our way toward the bulkhead door through which a little light from the boat deck outside shone. As we passed through the door, a hand reached out and squeezed each one of us briefly on the arm. "Good luck," said a voice. It was the chaplain.

The moon was still shining dimly on the deck, but though we could now see, we clung close to each other for fear of becoming separated. From every passageway men, shuffling in dreary, silent attitudes, were coming out to swell the tide of those going in on the assault waves. They made a depressing sight—a composite of dead and dull faces and drab bodies loaded down with military gear. As we turned the corner of a bulkhead, the man ahead of me halted

hesitantly before a boat which was swinging violently back and forth, first toward the deck and then away from it. Several voices behind us shouted and tried to allay any feelings of doubt we had. As we hesitated, they shouted cheerfully: "Get in. What are you waiting for?"

These words, spoken to show us that we were at the right boat, did not produce the action desired. The man who was leading our group paused on hearing those words, raised his hands in a helpless gesture and called back to the others: "I can't get in." As he said this, the men back of us yelled as if they were going to throw a fit. The leading soldier, however, remained adamant and made no move to get in the boat.

From my vantage point, it was evident that he was quite right in refusing to do so. The boat was rocking to and fro on its davits, coming close against the ship's side at one moment and swinging far away at the next. The only way to enter the boat was to slide down a short knotted line and drop in. But to attempt to drop in that swinging boat would be suicidal. One slight slip would mean a plunge down into the water, which was slapping now with a loud and menacing sound against the ship's side below us. So both the soldier and I remained standing where we were, looking at the dark void between the swinging boat and the ship, making no attempt to get in.

The crowd behind us, growing impatient, again yelled imperatively at us. Goaded by the angry voices, the soldier by me said: "Goddamit, there's no one here. Where the hell's the navy?" At these words, the men behind us transferred their disapproval from us to the whole American Navy.

"Dammit! Get some sailors!" one officer yelled.

"Jesus!" said another, "the way the navy's hiding, you'd think they was going to invade Sicily instead of us."

As yet the delay had not been serious, but in our overwrought state of mind it assumed exaggerated proportions, increasing our nervousness to a state of shaking, angry doubt.

"God!" said an officer who had come up beside us, "if we can't get our boats launched from the ship, what's it going to be like in the water when they start shooting at us?"

The soldier by my side laughed bitterly. "Snafu! That's us. Always snafued."

At last two or three sailors arrived, the boat was secured firmly,

the soldiers slid one by one down the knotted ropes, and the boat descended past the ship's side into the choppy water.

As we drew away from the ship, our moment's irritability dropped away from us as quickly as it had come. There was an immediate sense of gladness at getting started and a heightened awareness. When we got away from the shelter of the fleet, this feeling, however, soon gave way to another. We became sick.

The rocking of the small landing craft was totally unlike anything we had experienced on the ship. It pitched, rolled, swayed, bucked, jerked from side to side, spanked up and down, undulated, careened and insanely danced on the throbbing, pulsing, hissing sea. The sea, itself flew at us, threw the bow in the air, then, as it came down, swashed over us in great roaring bucketfuls of water.

The ensign standing on the high stern of the boat ordered the sailor by the bow to close the half-open ramp. As he moved to do so, the helmsman in the stern yelled: "I can't see. . . ."

He did not finish his sentence. At that moment there was a loud hissing sound, then a dull squashing crash, and a wave of water cascaded through the ramp, throwing down those who were standing on the deck and overrunning the boat with water.

"Bail with your helmets!" called the ensign in a voice of extreme irritation.

Kneeling now in the puddle which sloshed up and down the length of the boat, the men scooped up the water with their helmets, staggered uncertainly to their feet, threw their load overboard and then went down on their knees again to repeat the process.

Meanwhile, the ensign kept the boat zigzagging over the water searching in the sea for the boats of our assault wave. From time to time he would shout out to another boat: "Are you the second wave?" When he would receive a negative answer, he would curse loudly, turn the boat in another direction and begin searching again.

For a long time we coursed back and forth over the water, picking up one boat here and another there. Then we went into a circle, going round and round in the shadow of our fleet till, certain that every boat was present, we broke out of the circle formation and headed in a line toward a blue light, which, shining to seaward, was bobbing up and down some distance ahead of us.

The uneven motion of the boat was now almost unbearable. Hemmed in between the high steel bulkheads of the boat, the men crouched like beasts, shivering from the cold spray, silent, but un-

easy with imminent sickness. One by one they vomited, holding their heads away from their loosely clasped rifles, and moaned softly. One man clambered up the side of the boat and crawled out on the narrow ledge running around the top and clung there like a monkey, with one hand clasping the boat and the other fumbling at his pants. The boat was rocking heavily; the man was swaying with its motion, and it seemed momentarily as if he would fall into the sea or a wave would wash him overboard. The ensign in a sharp voice commanded him to get back inside the boat.

"I have to move my bowels, Sir," the man said in a tone of distressed pain.

Someone tittered.

"Jesus! What's so funny about that?" said a soldier, and he got up and grasped the man, who was now half-hanging over the side by his shoulders. "Here, Joe," he said, "hold on to me."

From that time on, our dash toward the unseen shore became a nightmare of sickness, pain and fear. The boat had gathered speed now and we were beginning to bound from one wave crest to the next with a distinct shock. There were no thwarts, no seats of any kind in the boat; only the deck itself to sit on and the steep, high hull of the boat to lean against. The motion of the boat threw us all against one another. My hand in bracing my rolling body had accidentally come to rest on the shoulder of a young boy. I looked down at him and saw that he was holding his head in both of his hands and quietly vomiting. "It's the motion that gets you," I said.

"The what?" the boy said.

"The motion. It's different from on the ship. You'll get used to it. You'll be all right."

"Oh, sure. The motion. You ain't kiddin'. I'll be all right." He bent his head down, a sudden spasm contracting his shoulders, and he spewed from the mouth. "Oh, sure, I'll be all right."

I stood up and took a quick look over the boat's side. Astern our great fleet fled, diminishing, sinking beneath the waves. The boat had begun to pitch and shudder now, swooping forward and down, jolting almost stationary for a moment, then lifting and swooping again; a shot of spray smashed aboard over the bows like a thrown bucket of water, and I knelt down again.

The boat pounded on. It rolled us against iron pipes, smashed us against coils of wire and jammed us on top of one another, compounding us with metal, water and vomit. There was nothing we

could do but wait, herded helplessly between the high, blank walls of the boat, huddled together like blind men not knowing where we were going or what was around, behind or ahead of us, only looking at one another with anxious eyes. That not being able to tell what was ahead of us, to catch even one slight glimpse of the universe outside our tossing, rocking world, was almost unbearable, leaving us, as it did, prey to all manner of nighttime fancies. The unnatural and unwholesome motion of the boat, churning my stomach into an uproar, the bare and opaque walls of the hull, shutting out everything but the vault of the sky overhead, evoked in my mind a picture of the world outside that was fantastic and terrifying. Instead of feeling myself part of a group of American soldiers going ashore on a carefully planned invasion, I saw myself and the men as strange phantoms flung out across the maw of the sea, into the blackness of eternity, fast revolving away from any kind of world we ever knew. I felt as if we had been caught up in some mysterious rocket, and that we were being borne onward in this bouncing projectile of machinery toward a nether-world goal as incapable of taking command over our own destinies as a squirrel in a cage.

In a moment of hollow doubt I stood up, edging my eyes over the gunwale and looking out into the comparative world of light around us. The sea was sparkling with tossed spray. Ahead, and on either side of us, boats were dodging and twisting through the choppy waves, and from their sterns, waving from side to side with the motion of the boats, showers of gleaming water streamed out behind like the plumes of birds. What was causing the water to gleam was a wide streak of light. It sprang like the tail of a stationary comet from a ball of incandescent yellow that was shining on the edge of the blackness off to our left.

Suddenly, the light swung across the water, fastened on our boat and illuminated us like actors on a darkened stage. In the glare, I saw the green, pale faces of the soldiers and their bodies huddling close against the hull. Then the light shot past and over us.

"Why don't they shoot out that goddam searchlight?" growled a voice from the depths of the cavernous boat. "Jesus! We'll be drowned without knowing what hit us!"

"Steady there!" said the voice of Captain Paul Carney. "Take it easy."

Again I craned my neck upward, just getting the top of my helmet above the hull and looking out with fascinated eyes. The light

had now swung onto a small group of boats which were thrashing wildly from side to side trying to escape off into the darkness. From somewhere ahead faint red flashes began to flicker like fireflies. Then red balls, describing a high arc like a tennis lob, arched over our heads and fell down toward the illuminated boats which could not seem to shake off the hunting glare of the searchlight. At this I drew in my breath and involuntarily I shouted: "They're shooting at the boats." Below me, from the soldiers crouching with their heads toward the bottom of the boat, floated up an echo: "Shooting at the boats—Jesus!"

Abruptly, our boat slowed down. Above me, and slightly to the right, hung a blue light, seemingly suspended in the air. Dimly I discerned the outlines of a naval patrol vessel. Out of the darkness above mysteriously came a metallic voice: "Straight ahead! Go straight ahead. You'll see a small light on your right. Land there. Look out for mines. Good luck."

It was all very eerie—rocking there on the sea and hearing a voice calling out of the black above us. But I had no time to think of this. Our engine gave a sudden full-throated roar as the ensign cut off the underwater exhaust. The boat leapt forward. The other boats behind us raced around to either side of us, and we sped forward like a charging football line. "Hurry!" I thought. "God! If we can only make it!" The sea cascaded through the ramp and a broadside of water catapulted down on us. The boat shuddered, bucked, then plunged onward in a confident show of power.

All my senses were now alerted to the straining point. A flush of thrill and excitement shot through me like flame. It was wonderful. It was exhilarating.

Smash! Pound! Roar! Rush!—toward the goal. Here we come! Wheee! My mouth was open and I giggled with insane laughter.

The sailor by the bow tapped me on the shoulder. I peered around. The boy was pointing. Ahead—directly ahead—two strings of dotted red light were crossing each other. They came out from right and left, like two necklaces of strung red and black beads, and crossed each other in the air some distance before us.

"Machine guns!" the sailor shouted. "Theirs." The little fireflies of light were growing very close now. "Going right through them!" the sailor shouted. He made a gesture with his hand across his throat. "Right through them."

Snap! I heard a sharp cracking sound. Snap! Snap! Snap! Jitter-

ing, I ducked down below the side of the boat. Then I half slid, half fell to the deck, huddling low with the rest of the soldiers. I was on fire inside, but outside I was cold. I could feel all my flesh jerking. It was not from excitement. No longer did I feel any thrill. The boat was pitching and rocking like a roller coaster. I knelt now and was sick. Gasping for breath I wiped the strings of sputum from my lips, drawing my sleeve across my chin. Dimly I saw the boy beside me on all fours with his mouth wide open and his head bent down. I tried to pull myself together and sidled over and held his head. My gesture was almost automatic. I told myself I had to be of some use. But I no longer cared about anything. The boat seemed to be spinning like a merry-go-round. Dazed, I wished that a shell would come along and end all this horror, wetness and misery. If we could only get out of this insanely rocketing prison. If the boat would only stop for just a moment.

Soon I was almost beyond feeling. All I knew was that we were enclosed in an infernal machine, shuddering through the darkness, toward the edge of the world, toward nowhere. I did not feel the boat slow down. I neither heard nor saw men get to their feet. At first, all I felt was a violent shudder. Then I heard the engine break out into a terrible throbbing roar. At last, there was a jerk and a bump and the boat came to a halt.

"Open ramp!" shouted the ensign at the stern.

Glancing fearfully toward the bow of the boat, I saw it swinging down, like a huge jaw opening. Halfway down it stopped, stuck. We could see nothing. Only a half-open hole.

The soldiers stared at the hole as if fascinated. Grappling at the side of the boat, they pulled themselves to their feet, and peered uncertainly out into the darkness through the ramp. For a brief moment they stared at each other, then bent their heads down, shuffling their feet. No one moved.

The ramp jerked down farther until it was level with the water. Still nothing could be seen. Still no one moved.

"Get off!" Major Grant's voice was imperious.

No one moved.

"Jump off!" he hollered again. "You want to get killed here? Get on that beach!"

With these words he leapt out into the darkness. Another man with a coil of wire followed. The others hesitated as if waiting to see what happened to those who had jumped.

I felt I would go crazy if I stayed in the boat any longer. I advanced to the ramp. "Here it comes," I thought and jumped.

The water struck me like a shock. I kept going down. "It's over my head," I thought. My feet sank down and touched bottom. My chin was just at the water. I started to push forward. A sharp crackle burst the air near by. There was a whine and whizz overhead. Then a metallic, plunking sound as if something was striking the boat.

The water was growing shallower. I bent my knees, keeping only my helmet-covered head above the water. I felt as if I were wearing a shield. Finding I wasn't hit, I realized the machine-gun fire was so far surprisingly light. "Hell!" I said to myself, "this is not as bad as the Mareth Line."

It was dark. The fires that had been visible from the ship could not be seen here. Ahead of me I made out a sandy beach, rising in a slight slope. Figures were crawling on hands and knees up the slope. Every few moments they halted and lay flat on their stomachs. By now the water was really shallow. I straightened up and dashed for the beach. Bullets snapped overhead. I threw myself flat on the sand. At last, I was on dry land.

4

As they poured from the boats onto the firm, solid ground, the soldiers shed their nausea and fear as easily and as quickly as they dropped their life belts on the beach. They stamped their feet on the steady ground, and so strong was their sense of relief and release that each one of them felt a new surge of life, hope and satisfaction at a danger already past.

After all the agitation of the sea and the uncertain rocking of the boat the ground suddenly seemed solid and secure. How calming, too, was the near-by silence, but how uncertain! There was no firing in our direction now; yet everything was dark and confusing. What was happening? Where was the enemy? Where was the town of Gela which we were to assault? What should we do?

"Get inland! Keep moving!"

These words, barked out sharply by Major Grant, snapped us back to reality and instantly solved our dilemma. The men who were huddling together on the sands rose, upon hearing these words, bent forward in a half-crouch and moved in a weaving fashion away

from the beach. After a short distance we halted in a grove of trees to get our bearings. Explorers in a strange land, we thought that any false step might be our last, so we held a conference. The men, their teeth chattering from their immersion in the cold water, gathered around Major Grant and his executive officer, Captain Paul Carney, listening to what was said. I was pressing in with the others when I felt a tap on my shoulder, and, turning, I saw a soldier holding out his bared arm toward me.

"I'm wounded," he said. "Got me as I was coming off the boat."

"Where are you hurt?" I said.

"I don't know. So much blood, I can't see."

"Don't you bother, Sir," said another soldier, coming up; "he's my buddy; I'll fix him."

At that moment, on our left and close at hand, a fierce, shrieking shout pierced the air. All conversation stopped. As one man we dropped to the ground.

Again that shout, loud as brass, but unintelligible, rang through the trees. Then all was silence.

The grove was quiet as death. On our stomachs beneath the bushes, we lay like corpses, tensely listening for the slightest sound. Peering cautiously from under my helmet, I stared at a little rise of ground directly in front of me. Gradually, my eyes became accustomed to the darkness. There, on top of the slope, etched against the sky line, about thirty yards away, I made out—yes, I was sure of it—a pillbox! I stared at it in silence, rooted to the ground. I felt my flesh jerk and twitch as it flashed over me that there might be hidden ambushes like this all around. The stillness of the scene and the blank walls of that pillbox were horrible.

Even as I stared appalled and fear-stricken at that grimly buttressed little fort, the voice pierced through the air again like a flash of sheer terror. This time there could be no doubting; the voice came from that pillbox. There it was again! Strange! but it no longer sounded fierce. Now it was high-pitched, like a sobbing scream. With a curious sense of detached wonder I thought: "That's the voice of a man in terror. He's more afraid than we are."

That was the thought that came to me—and it came also, simultaneously, without a word of communication between us, to the soldiers beside me—the thought that the man in that pillbox was afraid.

"He wants to surrender," hissed a voice.

Those words, the first spoken in many moments, released a

pent-up tension, and we yelled, almost all of us in unison: "Surrender! Surrender! Surrender!" Then we waited. But the darkness threw back only silence, and the pillbox showed no signs of life.

"Shoot the bastard! We can't wait here all day!" The soldier who had growled out these words got impatiently to his feet.

"No," said a voice from the ground, "don't shoot. Maybe these people don't want to fight."

Two or three soldiers began wriggling through the sand and bushes toward the pillbox. As they did so, an Italian-American soldier called out in a loud voice: "*Veni igual!*"

At this a shadowy figure appeared in the entrance to the pillbox. Then a form crept out, like a beast from a cave, on all fours. As we tensely watched, this phantom crawled down the slope toward us, half screaming, half sobbing, and yelling something that sounded like "*Bastos! Bastos!*"

We pounced on him, pulled him erect, made out his Italian uniform, searched him and, shoving him before us, pushed once more inland.

Our way led at first over and through a series of dunes, and the sand clinging to our wet garments formed a kind of heavy mud which weighted us down and made the going very tiring. As we pushed diagonally inland, the dunes came between us and the sea like a barrier so that momentarily we were cut off from the beach. Behind the dunes we now and again heard fierce unintelligible shouts, and we dropped to our knees again, listening intently. Though it gave us an uncomfortable feeling to have a possible enemy between us and the beach, we could not wait to search him out, for we had an objective to take and we were already behind schedule. So we continued pushing forward.

Major Grant and Captain Carney were stumbling back and forth across the sands, from one knot of soldiers to another, sniffing like bloodhounds, seeking to find the flanks of our still unassembled force. "Spread out! Spread out!" they would cry in hoarse whispers, pushing two soldiers toward the right and then two toward the left.

The whole scene filled me with fear and fascinated wonder. Everything was too strange, too uncertain, too full of the unknown. I looked at the jerking figures, and the ghostly trees, and brushes, and I was sick with the mystery and with the dread adventure of exploring a foreign hostile land. True, we had the map of this area burned into our brains. But now at night, in the experiencing instead of in

the studying, there was nothing that even faintly resembled the markings on that map. Everything was unknowable, not a piece of ground we had ever seen before, not one familiar landmark, not a guide, not a signpost, not a house along the lonely way where we might stop and ask directions. Every tree, every bush, every clump of ground and dune of sand—what hidden surprises did they not hold?—a lurking sniper, a well-emplaced machine gun or a ready, waiting ambush. This alien land seemed filled with all the mystery of life and ever-waiting death. So I looked at the land and the weaving, cautious figures with a sense of wonder, a feeling of adventure and all the stunning excitement of fear. But to what purpose did I, an unarmed man, scribbling undecipherable words on a notebook, follow ridiculously these soldiers, heavily accoutered for murder, so frightfully cautious, so terribly earnest about everything? My actions made no sense, and those of the soldiers seemed unreal, and they were like imagined ghosts. But it was more real than anything I had imagined and the effect was overpowering. The whole thing was phantasmal.

We stumbled on. Behind us the sea fled; the beach, the dunes and the sand vanished. Ahead of us the hills approached, and on them dully gleamed dying fires, which from the ship we had thought were the lights of a city, but which now we saw was timber burning on the distant hills.

The dawn was now threatening, and we plunged down into a small wood for cover.

Coming out on the far side of the woods, we suddenly burst upon a bamboo fence. This sign of human habitation startled us and gave us pause. Then we clambered over the fence, into a vegetable garden. A stone house loomed up gray before us. At the feel of the garden and the sight of that house I was inundated by a strange feeling of guilt. It seemed to me that we were robbers of the night descending on an unwary householder. Gingerly, we peered in the house. Two or three Italian soldiers were huddling there, trembling and too frightened to move. We disarmed them and moved on.

Slowly day dawned. We were in a vast grape vineyard, lying low beneath the knee-high vines, and that at first was all that we could see. When we curiously raised our heads from the vines, the hills were there on our right. They towered immense and threatening into the gray dawning light, and suddenly we were overwhelmed by the audacity of our ambition to conquer this hill-fortressed island.

On our left above us loomed sand dunes, shutting out the sea and making us feel insecure from the lack of evidence that our fleet was still there. Between the mountains and the dunes, I could see stray houses, dotting here and there green fields, and off in the distance, a mile or so away, poplar trees, extending in such an even, long line that we believed they were planted by a highway. At last, remembering our maps, we knew where we were. The good freshness of the awakening earth, the as-yet stillness of the morning and the apparent friendliness of the landscape acted like a tonic on our jaded spirits, and we had an instant sense of something refound, of a sanity restored to a chaotic world. For a brief exhilarating moment the romance, the mystery, the adventure of discovering a new land overwhelmed me in a strange flood of painful joy, and I savored once more the bittersweet taste of youth. The day, the world, the very sky was young again, and it was good to be alive.

"We been lucky as hell so far," said a radio operator in a tone of almost unbelieving awe.

"Yes, we're lucky," said Paul Carney, and his finger pointed toward something on the dunes there where they overlooked the sea. We followed his finger and saw three guns on the ridge above us, aimed out to sea in the direction of our fleet. On closer approach we saw the guns were crude wooden imitations of artillery pieces. "Yes," said Carney thoughtfully, "if those had been real guns, we never would have landed."

Taking shelter under a fig tree, Carney set up a temporary battalion headquarters, and tried to contact our different companies by radio. The rest of the battalion pushed on. Now that the sun was up, the enemy began to come alive. We heard planes from far off. They seemed to come out of the hills themselves. There were twenty of them, and they flew directly over and headed out to sea. Lying flat on our bellies and looking up in the sky, watching them, we were afraid for our fleet. From behind the sand dunes, we could not see the fleet, but each one of us wondered what we would do if the fleet were sunk while we were lying there. Hearing the explosions out to sea, we shivered. Then came the hard, sharp clatter of an ack-ack barrage and we could see the salt-and-pepper pattern in the sky—so thick that we felt instantly reassured.

A few moments later, enemy artillery spoke out of the hills on our north. From far out at sea there was a dull answering boom,

then a whizz overhead and a clatter in the hills beyond. The battle was warming up.

Lying there between the dueling guns, I could not help but be affected by a sense of the ridiculous, by a feeling of inadequacy. How arrogant we had been to assault this broad island! What a narrow tongue of land we held at the moment! All the enemy had to do now was swoop down out of the hills and throw us back into the sea.

With this thought in mind I looked at the hills in some alarm, but I could see no activity there. Meanwhile, there was a small fight going on about the town of Gela which we could see quite clearly in the sparkling light of the new sun. The little town, with its whitewashed roofs and its church spire sticking out higher than all the rest, was perched on the knob of a small hill that dominated the narrow flat land where we were lying. We could see our men working their way up from the hill and then figures charging down from the top of the hill toward them. We watched curiously the labors of both sides for a while, not allowing ourselves to get excited; for we knew it would be a long day. Though we were close enough to see everything clearly, the lower slopes of the hill were continuously wrapped in wreaths of white smoke, and we could not tell exactly what was happening. From time to time two or three breathless soldiers would dash out of the smoke and would come back to us demanding ammunition. We had no spare ammunition, save what was with our machine guns, so we handed out the guns themselves one by one till we had none left. Bereft of any protection from the rear, we soon abandoned our position and pushed forward again.

The firing had diminished. Only sporadic rifle fire crackled round the lower slope of the hill. Ahead of us a column of infantry was creeping out from the bushes and the trees and crawling in single file through barbed wire which blocked the way into an orchard. A soldier in an Italian uniform was marching in the middle of the column. When we paused a moment in the orchard, the prisoner suddenly ran to the trees, jumped up, grabbed something that was growing on the branches there and rushed back to us with his hands full of loganberries, which he offered to us with a proud, happy smile. Plopping the proffered berries in our mouths, we grinned to show our appreciation and the prisoner ran off to fetch some more.

"Gee! That guy's happy to be with us," said Private Anthony Manzo. "He just walked into our lines and brought three other prisoners with him."

It soon developed that the prisoner knew Private Manzo's grandmother who lived not far from Sicily.

"These people, I bet, are all like my grandmother," said Manzo. "They don't want to fight us."

The Italian, as if understanding our conversation, gesticulated violently, broke into rapid speech, then broke off again, while Manzo translated. "Everyone wants to give up," said the Italian. "After June 10, when you dropped pamphlets saying you were not fighting the Italian people—after that—we knew you'd come. They wouldn't let us see a newspaper for fifteen days here, but we knew you'd come. Now you have your foot in Sicily, everyone will join you. Mussolini!" he spat on the ground. "The people are fed up with him. The government!" He spat again. "Sometimes they pay us and sometimes they don't. The people have no bread. Bring them food and everyone will help you."

The curious attitude of the captured soldier, who, contrary to what might have been supposed, was not fawning on us but actually seemed glad to see us, made a great impression on everyone. And before long our soldiers were expressing the desire to put the prisoner in an American uniform and keep him with them throughout the rest of the Italian campaign. These Italian soldiers whom we had a short while ago been so afraid would push us back into the sea now were posing as our friends. Strange, I thought, as we once more went on.

Four Italian soldiers were coming back along the path with a wooden door balanced precariously on their shoulders. When they drew aside to let us pass, we saw a lieutenant, whom we all knew, lying on the door, with his eyes wide open, and a small red stain spreading across his undershirt where it covered his stomach. With a kind of shock I recognized a young boy who had occupied a seat across the dinner table from me on the "Barnett." He, I remembered now, had several times during the voyage told us with a puzzled white face: "You know, I don't just feel right about this one. I think my number's come up." To see his premonition so startlingly fulfilled here before my eyes dazed me for a moment and I could not think of anything to say as we passed him by.

"I guess some of the officers didn't get their medals in Africa,"

I heard one soldier saying to the other on the path ahead of me.

This statement gave me pause. "They will be wounded or dead themselves, perhaps, in a few hours," I thought. "How can they talk this way?" Here they were on their way toward the enemy at Gela, passing their wounded comrades, winking at them and never giving a sign that they might soon be coming back in a litter or on a wooden door themselves. How curious it all was!

Crossing a stream by means of a bridge which our soldiers had seized soon after the landing and thereby prevented from being blown up, we entered a wood and began climbing the hill which we knew led directly into Gela. The sound of firing was now almost stilled. When we reached the top of the hill and came out in a sort of park, we found that the enemy had gone; that is, all but a few torn bodies which lay in various attitudes of resignation around the ruins of a Roman column.

For the first time now we saw civilians. In the doorway of a straw hut an old peasant woman stood watching us with a toothless smile on her face. "She's probably got a son in the army," said one of our soldiers, gazing at her with a frank, open stare of friendship. "Bet she's glad it's all over." At that he turned to the woman and gestured with his hands. "Feenish! *Americanos bueno!* All over. War feenish!" The woman grinned at this gibberish and rapidly nodded her head up and down.

On the side of the hill a small mud and straw house was on fire. A man was dashing around it frantically, with his arms thrown up in the air, the very picture of despair. From time to time he would stop, look at the flames, dash toward them, as if he would enter the house, then think better of it, stop again and then rush around in a frantic circle once more.

The sight of this peasant with his perspiring, agonized face impressed me more strongly than anything I had yet seen that day with the blind misery of war. Seized with a feeling of pity, I paused; then, because there was nothing I could do about it, I struggled after the rest of the column and entered the town of Gela.

5

I left our column and, passing through a narrow verminous alleyway, came out on a comparatively wide cobbled street. Jeeps, high-wheeled Sicilian wagons and knots of soldiers and small groups

of ragged, tubercular-looking people were standing around the houses. Some of the people held goats tethered to leashes, while most of them just stood and stared. Over by one building, a small group of soldiers lay in a heap of straw that was piled on the sidewalk. Some of them were munching raw tomatoes and one or two were sleeping with their heads thrown back in an attitude of utter weariness. One soldier was going down the middle of the street with his rifle slung over his shoulder and a bottle of wine tipped to his lips. Elsewhere soldiers stood on street corners with their rifles held tightly, on the alert.

Everything was so different from what I expected, that in no part of the scene before me could I find what looked like a battleground. With all my staring I could not discover any evidence of a battle still being in progress. Yet I knew somewhere beyond the town, at least, there must be fighting.

I thought: "I must find out someone who can tell me what happened here," and seeing a building more imposing than the rest, inscribed boldly with the letters "DUCE!" which were now partially covered by an American flag, I entered.

I climbed a narrow wooden staircase and, turning at the top, I entered a low-ceilinged room, where, behind a desk, a red-faced American officer, with his nearly bald but still youthful head bared, sat tilted back in a chair looking up at three or four Italians who were gesticulating at him with some excitement. This was Colonel William Darby, commander of the Rangers, who had directly assaulted and taken the town of Gela while we had been attacking it from the flank. At present, he had installed himself as mayor of Gela, and was trying to straighten out arguments that had already cropped up.

After the Italians had gone, and in answer to my persistent questioning, he wearily recounted how he had captured the town. From his story, I gathered that within seven hours of landing on the beach, he and his Rangers had smashed their way into Gela, knocked out two coastal batteries that were firing on our navy, stopped an Italian tank counterattack with rifles and grenades, wiped out enemy resistance, captured 400 prisoners and, before lunch, instructed the civil population of 32,000 on their future behavior.

It seemed like a pretty good morning's work to me and I asked him if it had been as easy at it sounded.

"Well, it was sort of rough for a while," he admitted. "About nine o'clock I thought we had resistance stamped out, so I sent the town crier through the streets to shout the news and tell the people that we were Americans that had come to help them. That brought the people out . . ."—he paused and wiped his hand over his face—"and about then eight Eyetie tanks—there were real Fascists in those babies—came down from the hills and started zoomin' through the streets. They raised hell . . ."—he laughed, as if remembering something. "We didn't have a damn thing ashore. I told everyone to get inside the buildings. But, hell, I didn't have to tell them. You should have seen them run. They climbed up on roofs and hung out the windows throwing down hand grenades and firing machine guns at the tanks. They might just as well have thrown cream puffs at them for all the effect it had. I saw one tank coming down a street and I chased around the block in my jeep, swung around a corner, ran up on a sidewalk and started shooting at him with my 30-caliber machine gun. I must have fired 300 rounds at him. It wasn't doing any good and the tank still kept coming on. I ran like hell then." He laughed again. "And I drove right down to the pier and found an antitank gun there and loaded it up on my jeep. I picked up Captain Charlie Shunstrom and we went after the tank. Every time we slammed a shell in that dismounted gun, she recoiled on Shunstrom and knocked him ass over teakettle into the back seat. But we hit the tank and knocked it out. After that we got another tank cornered right in the middle of the street. We must have put it out of commission because it wouldn't move. But nobody would come out of it either. Everyone was firing rifles, machine guns and hand grenades at it, but that damn tank just sat there and no one came out. I said: 'Here, let me fix 'em,' and I fired an assault grenade at the tank, but that didn't budge 'em either. They were tough guys all right! Seeing they wanted to play rough, I thought I'd play rough too. So I took an incendiary grenade and walked up and slapped it on top of the tank. It began dripping down inside, and we saw a little smoke coming out of the tank; then the turret opened and they all poured out screaming like they were mad. After that we got another tank, and the rest ran away. It's been pretty quiet since then."

A sergeant, who entered during Darby's speech, had waited in silence for his superior officer to finish speaking. But now he interrupted him in some impatience.

"Tanks are reported coming up the highway north of us," he said in a tone of affected nonchalance.

Darby did not seem surprised, as though he had expected this all the time.

"Well, they won't chase us around the streets like they did the last time," he said hurriedly and got up strapping on his pistol belt.

I went outside.

"Jesus! Look at that, will ya, Joe."

I turned at the sound of the soldier's voice and noted down at the corner of the street a slight commotion.

A little procession was coming along the cobbles, moving in the direction that led out of town. A cart, drawn by a small donkey, with its wheels askew, and wobbling from side to side, was coming down the road past us. In front of the donkey, several children ran back and forth, contorting their faces in grimaces of gamin horror. Three men, one of whom held the donkey's reins, walked just ahead of the cart, their swarthy, thin faces sweating profusely. In the cart, lying in a doubled-up crumpled position, was a half-naked peasant stained profusely with blood.

Lieutenant Jack Senseny and I stood there watching, and an old and wrinkled man leaned out of an upper-story window, shook his fist at us and made several obscene gestures. As we went down the hill again toward the beach, we could still hear him shouting imprecations.

We wandered along the beach seeking my typewriter, which was to have been brought ashore on an amphibious jeep in one of the later waves. I did not know exactly where to find it and knew it would be a thankless search.

After a short walk, we noticed in the water, about twenty yards from shore, an abandoned jeep, over which the surf was running in babbling white waves. On a sudden instinct, I searched inside it and discovered my typewriter which was covered with a thick goo-ey, white substance that clogged all the keys. It was hissing with a strange sound, as if some chemical reaction had been set up by the water. Feeling downhearted because I now could not write any story, I shoved the useless typewriter in my musette bag, and we ploughed on in search of the headquarters of the First Division.

Passing by the spot where we had landed the night before, I was amazed to see the great number of mines that the sappers had dug out of the beach. Either they had become wet, I thought, there in

the sand and so had been rendered useless, or they had been set to explode only on contact with heavy vehicles. This latter was partially true; for, as we learned, several jeeps, including that of Brigadier-General Roosevelt—only, luckily, he wasn't in it—had been blown up when they landed after us. The sight of these mines roused in me a very conscious knowledge of how lucky we had been so far.

From one end to the other the beach provided an astounding spectacle. Tiny infantry landing craft were coming in all up and down the sea front, and other larger boats were edging toward the shore to swell the monstrous and ever-growing heap of beached war materiel. I looked with choked eyes at the endless, confused mass of men, of tiny jeeps, huge, high-sided ducks and more jeeps and heavily loaded trucks, stuck and straining in the thick sand or moving clumsily on the wire netting that the engineers had already laid down in some places as a road. Along the beach, on every side, from the water's edge to the shrubbery growing by the dunes, from every conceivable direction, there was the roar of motors, the sound of spinning wheels, the puttering of incoming craft, the buzzing of planes overhead, the shouts of drivers, the loud orders of traffic policemen, the curses of soldiers, mechanics, gun crewmen and officers. In the surf at the edge of the beach I saw abandoned trucks, overturned jeeps and smashed boats, and on the sands there were blown-up cars, a tank with its tread off, heaps of bedding rolls and baggage with soldiers sitting on them, waiting for transportation, mechanics struggling over broken-down vehicles, and supply troops gathering up broken-open boxes of rations. Where the wire-screen road had not been laid down, the crush of men, vehicles and guns became greater, and there sounded a ceaseless roar of shouts, curses and anguished straining machinery. Trucks, floundering to their hubcaps in the sand, futilely raced their engines as jeeps, jerking this way and that, tried to pull them out and soldiers put their backs against the trucks and heaved with muscle-tightened faces and deep grunts torn from their stomachs. Officers superintending beach traffic rode up and down in jeeps. Their irritable voices made only a slight impression on all the uproar, and their faces looked as if they despaired of ever getting any order out of the chaos. Despite it all, traffic still managed to keep moving and materiel kept flowing inland from the beach.

The sun was beginning to set now, and larger craft were steaming

up to the very beach itself, opening their mouths at the water's edge and disgorging ducks, antitank guns and a few tanks. Two of these landing craft, loaded with antitank guns had just drawn up to the beach directly opposite where we were. The ramp had been let down and vehicles were beginning to move off. We were just passing by when our attention was seized by a mass of running figures. They were streaming away from the ocean with their faces turned up and backward in a look of fear, panic and expectation. At the same moment a tremendous clatter of guns ripped the air apart on every side. Genuinely alarmed by the fleeing figures and the sharp staccato of the guns, I did not pause to look around—for instinctively I knew that planes must be near—but turned and fled away from the water as fast as I could go.

Seized with the same momentary panic as everyone else, I was hastening across the sands when I heard the buzz-saw roar of a plane very close overhead. Instinctively, I looked up to see where it was. I caught one glimpse of a plane not 200 feet above me and at the same time a black cylindrical object dropping from it. Without hesitating I threw myself flat on the ground. In the same motion I jerked off my musette bag and put it over my neck. Then I heard a high, shrill whine in the air. Something shrieked by me, followed by a sharp, explosive crack and a crashing jar. The ground rose and struck me in the stomach and a splash of water slapped against me like slung shot.

Feeling that instant relief that anyone feels after a bomb has struck and he knows that he has not been hit, I squirmed in the sand and looked over my shoulder to the near-by water. There, directly behind me on the sea, from one of the large tank craft, a column of gray smoke could be seen climbing upward.

As I watched, the column spiraled out in clouds, and suddenly a billowing mass of black vapor burst over the deckhouse, hiding it from sight, and a dancing shower of orange sparks sprayed over the blue water. At this the men sprang from their shelters and rushed across the sands toward the stricken boat. I followed.

In a very few moments, shrieks, groans and shouted oaths rang across the beach, and beneath them sounded the sinister crackling of fire. The space on the beach around the struck ship began to fill up; soldiers came scurrying out of bushes, M.P.'s roared up on jeeps and in the meantime trucks loaded with ammunition rushed away in the opposite direction. Suddenly, from the depths of the ship came

a series of rapid-fire explosions, a vast spray of sparks shot up in the air and lobbed down on the beach fifty yards away where ammunition was stored. The crowd drew back from the water, alarmed.

"Goddamit!" said an officer excitedly. "That'll blow up all the ammunition on this beach."

As if he had heard, and understanding the danger, the captain of the tank ship drew up his ramp and backed hastily away from the beach. The other boat followed, pouring a stream of water from a hose into her sister ship.

The crowd dispersed. Men went back to their duties. A staff officer of the First Division, who had remained behind staring as if hypnotized at the burning boat, shook his head sadly. "That's got our antitank guns aboard," he said. "It's going to be just too bad if they come at us with tanks tomorrow."

Only barely did I hear his words. I was caught up in some inner tumult at the magnificence of the scene before me. The whole panorama was one of the most purely spectacular I had seen in many years of war. As if all the army, navy and air ministers of the world had combined to produce it, the whole terrible, logical culminating menace of modern industry, the whole theatre of war—a very World's Fair of War—land, sea and air—lay here before me in all its gigantic, splendid, overwhelming meaninglessness. The hollow bowl of the sea formed by the descending twilight was filled with ships of every conceivable tonnage, size and purpose. The rim of the horizon ten miles out to sea was lined with transports—majestic assurance that our supply lines were still intact. And from the transports new hordes of tiny craft, like water bugs, were scooting toward the shore to add their own heaped-up loads and the chattering of their own roaring engines to the riot and the confusion already on the beach. Above this scene planes dove and rolled. Below them the flames from a burning oil tanker out at sea and the landing craft near at hand lifted up their scarlet hands, tingeing the gray ships and the olive vehicles and the drab uniforms and the dull sand and the green bushes with a ghostly quality. I was stifling with the harsh and menacing opulence of it, sick and fainting with the movement and the vast indigestibility of it all. The whole thing seemed utterly impossible.

"Wish I was a painter," said Senseny by my side. "Kinda gets ya, doesn't it?"

"Gets you, all right," I said, as we wearily went on to division

headquarters. This was in a grove of lemon trees, beneath the brow of a hill about 400 yards from the beach. As might be supposed, everything was a blur of confusion, with everyone stumbling over one another in the dark and lost soldiers searching hopelessly for their units. Two such men, Staff Sergeant Ronald Snyder and Private Michael Zolvick, by name, we found under a tree, philosophically putting away the last of a box of K rations. They were parachutists and they had dropped down on Sicily out of the darkness the night before and become lost from their company, the fate of which neither of them yet knew. After many varied adventures, one of which included hiding for several hours in a tree, they had escaped back to our lines, bringing forty prisoners with them. Snyder was so proud of his prisoners that he had made the lieutenant to whom he delivered them on the beach sign a receipt for them. This he now took out of his pocket and showed us with a pleased grin.

What impressed me more than anything else in the parachutists' story was the fact that though they were lost from their own unit and though they had been through a dozen dreadful adventures in the night and day, yet they hadn't abandoned their cheerfulness and were quite as ready to fight with the First Division as with their own Eighty-second Airborne Division. In short, they were able readily to adapt themselves to circumstances.

That was the way everyone was around camp that night. The bedding and the baggage had not come; nobody knew where anybody else or anything was, yet everyone moved about quite independently, taking care of himself.

Shouldering a blanket, which Lieutenant-Colonel Bob Porter, head of our G-2, had given me, I went up on the side of the hill to sleep. The night was warm and clear. Out at sea there was the twinkle of our fleet's ack-ack guns. Closer at hand was the glow of the burning ship. Overhead the moon stood high in the sky, and the stars gleamed around it.

Gazing at the starlit sky, at the moon, at the flickering guns and the glow of the fire, I felt a thrill of sad joy. "How strange it all is! What can it all mean?" I thought. And suddenly, convulsively, when I thought of all the terror of the landing in the night, and all the weary blot and blur of the day, I knew how good it was to be alive.

Chapter VII

Landing in the Enemy's Rear

" . . . it is the general impression of the dissolution of all physical and moral forces and the heart-rending sight of the bloody sacrifice which the commander has to contend with in himself, and then in all others who directly or indirectly transfer to him their impressions, feelings, anxieties and efforts. As the forces in one individual after another die away and can no longer be excited and maintained by his own will, the whole inertia of the mass gradually rests its weight on the will of the commander. By the spark in his breast, by the light of his spirit, the spark of purpose, the light of hope, must be kindled afresh in all others."

—VON CLAUSEWITZ

I

THE Germans were falling back on Messina after destroying the bridges. Sometimes they blew up the side of a hill, causing a landslide and leaving the road hanging in the air over the sea; and always they mined. Our army couldn't advance any faster than the engineers could walk, and in that fashion, it would take many weeks to complete the conquest of Sicily.

The only thing to do was to outflank the enemy. To do so through the hills on the south would be as slow as walking behind our engineers along the demolished roads, so we decided to go around the enemy flank on the north by sea.

On August 9 the Second Battalion of the American Third Division made a landing in the enemy's rear. The Germans by luck escaped that trap and, withdrawing into a new position near Cape Orlando, again blocked our advance some seventy miles from Messina. As there was no help for it, the Second Battalion—this time

reinforced by Sherman tanks, self-propelled guns, mortars and engineers—on the evening of August 10 again boarded their small invasion armada and, heading for the town of Brolo on the northern coast of Sicily, once more planned to land in the enemy's rear and trap his army or force it to evacuate.

It was a warm summer evening. The sea was calm and the boats rocked only gently so that the men had a chance to rest without being seasick. Not yet recovered from their landing two nights previously, they lay on the deck in various attitudes of fatigue, seemingly stupefied by the continuing pressure of battle. Some fitfully dozed; others chatted nervously. From their conversation it was evident that all of them were on edge with weariness and doubt.

One soldier said to me: "I can't sleep. Every time I close my eyes I see artillery bursting."

Another said: "Some of the men are so tired they have been crying."

If all the soldiers could have spoken as one man or if that indefinable something that is the soul of a battalion could have at that moment given voice to its mood, it probably would have done so in the following fashion:

"An amphibious operation is always risky. Fighting in the enemy's rear is frightening. To combine these two things—a landing and a fight in the enemy's rear—is an act of disconcerting uncertainty. We did it once and were lucky. To attempt it now again on this very night fills my soul with mortal dread."

That's the way the men felt almost to a man. I say these things now in order that some brummagem historian may not in the future insult the good sense of American troops by saying that they landed behind the enemy's lines with a sense of eager anticipation. Such hearthside fairy tales only detract from the glory of the American soldiers who accomplished this mission. For it is only in the light of their fatigue, doubts and fears that the action of the Second Battalion in landing twice within three nights inside the enemy's lines can be fully appreciated.

So the men lay on deck and thought and talked and dozed and thought again. Sometime toward dusk, across their prone bodies, then onto a hatch above them, jumped a man with hollow cheeks and a jutting, angular jaw and a thin, sardonic mouth, from which depended an unlit pipe with a curving stem.

Lieutenant-Colonel Lyle Bernard, commander of the battalion, was about to address his men:

"I didn't want to make this operation." The colonel's words were harsh and bitter. "I didn't think I had enough men, enough tanks, or enough time. And I, like you, am tired."

The men were listening lackadaisically. Someone muttered: "B-loney." Here and there bitter, jeering comments were whispered about the deck. But as their commander continued speaking, the men, drawn close by his words, crept toward his feet and lay there listening raptly.

"When the Old Man told me there was no other way to take Sicily," the colonel's voice grew confidential, "I knew that this battalion—the best goddam amphibious battalion in the American army—had to do the job."

"If I get it this time," again the colonel's voice was harsh and bitter, "there are men who will say I was a goddam fool or a horse's ass. But I know this—if you're going to get it, it is better to get it while doing something. Call that officer bullshit or what you like."

For a moment the commander paused and that thin, sardonic smile played about his lips. When he spoke again, his voice was almost womanish in its soft gentleness.

"I know you men are worried as hell, worried whether the enemy is waiting for us, worried whether he is awake. I don't know that, but I do know that he will be awake goddam quick after we land."

Imperceptibly, the colonel's voice had grown quick and sharp again.

"They have no more idea where we're going to land than you do. We ought to hit this one like the last one. We have an open plain. Then a railway embankment. Then a hill. Abrupt as hell but I think you men could go up it if it were vertical. The best the Germans can do if you get up there is shoot over your head. He may have mortars, but if he does, he better keep quiet because I'm going to call on three destroyers and a cruiser and run that bastard off of there."

"E Company is going to block the road and stay with our tanks and guns in the flats, F and C Companies will go up the hill with me. I bet that sonofabitch won't sneak out of that trap."

The commander paused and glared.

"If we catch that bastard this time, we'll be in Messina within a week."

Snarling out these last words, the colonel clenched his fist and jutted his chin aggressively into the air. The men at his feet stirred restlessly, then wiggled nervously as if struck by a whip. Like leaves

set in motion by the wind, whispered comments rustled over the deck and Private Tommy Carr, of Chicago, croaked:

"We'll massacre them like they done on Saint Valentine's Day."

2

At half-past twelve, the ship's bell clanged urgently.

Heavy-eyed, the men rose from the deck and, silently groping their way toward the ship's rail, clambered over it and slid down rope nets into landing craft that were gently bobbing on the water below.

Everyone was tense, yet moved slowly. A boy, hesitating at the rail, took out a picture of his wife and gazed intently at it. From below petulant voices yelled: "Hurry up. We're late now." The boy sighed and taking a last long look at the picture said: "Here we go again, honey." Then he determinedly straddled the rail and disappeared down the ship's side.

Already everyone of the first assault wave was off the ship. The landing craft bobbed away, and then, forming into line, the little procession puttered slowly down a path of yellow light that a gibbous moon had furrowed on the waters.

The moon was just beginning to fade. Turning dusty orange, it glowed mysteriously like an Oriental lamp, then grew dim and went out altogether. The boats vanished in the gloom; their puttering grew fainter in the distance, then died, and everything was black and silent.

In the wardroom Colonel Bernard was passing around a letter from his daughter written in a well-formed but childish scrawl—"Daddy, I am going to write you every day"—and everyone was nervously commenting on how well she wrote.

"That's the only comfort a man has on a goddam job like this," said Bernard. Then he, too, sighed and putting the letter away in his pocket he said: "Come on," and led us down into the blackened hold of the ship.

There we scaled the steep sides of our ducks and sitting on them much like firemen on a hook and ladder we waited while our ship drew closer in to shore.

The air was suffocating. A man retched. A voice said: "That reminds me of the time I used to drink varnish remover," but no one laughed.

In the impenetrable gloom we could see nothing. Only a tiny green light that hung in the nowhere of the blackness above us. After a while the light changed from green to red and glowed as if warning us of approaching danger.

At that moment there was the muffled sound of a moving mechanism. The great ramp door creaked and opened slightly. A gray patch of light crept silently into the ship.

We sat on the ducks and watched the widening streak of light and wondered what was behind that slowly falling door.

Like a lowering veil the door slid down and down. Now we looked into the twinkling eyes of the sky. Now we saw the craggy peak of Mount Brolo. Now the lower hips of the hills. Now the moist mouth of the sea.

Splash! Our duck slid into the water and swam effortlessly toward the shore. The underwater exhaust made almost no sound. Ahead a destroyer close inshore loomed grayly menacing; her guns were silent but poised and ready. We threw her a grateful glance and passed on.

From the beach two yellow lights like fallen stars shone to seaward. Our engineers had marked well the goal and we headed confidently toward it.

Somewhere inland a shower of sparks sprayed the darkness with orange and red balls. Ours or the enemy's explosion? It didn't matter. Surprise was gone.

We cut out the underwater exhaust. Motors roared wide open. With spray flying our ducks thrashed for the beach.

With a sudden abrupt churning and rolling they rose from the sea and, shaking themselves free from spray, reared onto dry land.

It was exactly three fifteen.

"Get out! Get out!" shouts Major Fargo, battalion executive officer.

We vault to the ground. Blindly, feet ploughing through thick sand we follow Fargo. Barbed wire clutches at us. Snip, snip go the wire cutters and we are free and move on.

Duck low to get off the sky line. Pass over a railway embankment. Slide down into somebody's garden. Walk into a narrow cement irrigation ditch. Teeter like a tightrope walker. Seek to hold your balance. I suppress a desire to laugh. Perhaps I am getting battle-wacky.

Now we reach a lemon grove. Figures flit through the blackness

like wraiths. Voices urgently whisper. Where's G Company? Where's F Company? Where's the road? Where's the hill?

"Keep moving." We turn to the right, halt a moment, and then beyond Don Whitehead. I see there is no one. We are alone at the head of the column.

"So it's happened to me too," I thought. In the dark, lost contact. Were we two to be another lost platoon?

Turning sharply to the left, where we heard the rustling sound of moving figures, we came abruptly up against a line of barbed wire. We paused. A rifle shot snapped overhead. Firing instantly broke out from all sides. Ours or the enemy's?—what was the difference?—anyone's bullets could kill us. We threw ourselves to the ground. Sergeant Daily, who had joined us, snipped at the barbed wire. We crawled through and sheltered behind a stone wall. I no longer felt like laughing.

Abruptly, the firing ceased. Again there was only the sound of figures moving stealthily through the bushes and trees. Then somewhere a motor whined. Above the stone wall, above our heads, it rushed nearer, then flew by and grew fainter in the distance.

"Hell, why didn't someone fire on it?" said Daily.

Put, put, put. A mobile globule of sound was approaching down the road. A motorcycle.

Instantly, rifle fire whistled up from the roadside. Tires shrieked on macadam. A motor raced violently, then died.

Now the sound of several motors all at once roared toward us. We waited in ambush beneath the wall, taut and silent.

Like a crackling forest fire, rifles and machine guns split the air. Limned in the shooting light of tracer bullets, we saw wheel spokes and the red flashes of the bullets shooting through them.

A louder explosion shook the wall where we huddled. Lieutenant Thomas Rodgers was firing his bazooka. A flash of flame tore apart the darkness and spotlighted a careening truck and the white, frightened face of the driver. Then the dark night doused the flame, and in the blackness somewhere a crash sounded, a glass broke and a man shrieked and then groaned loudly.

The night was upside down with shouts, bullets and moving figures. We could not know what was happening. A private clapped his hand on somebody's shoulder and said: "What unit you from, Buddy?" A voice answered: "*Mein Gott.*" A pistol shot rang out; someone howled and then gurgled gutturally.

On our left a line of yellow tracers was streaking down toward the beach and our rear. Above us everything had momentarily grown still and silent. It was our chance to go on and we took it.

Creeping warily upward, we peered through a hole in the wall and then ventured gingerly onto the road. Three ghostly buildings with an overturned motorcycle and a body beside it confronted us.

Have you ever seen a movie in which figures slink alongside a gray building in the darkness? That was us—Sergeant Daily, his five men, Whitehead and I. We crept up to a white arrow signpost that said "Ficara" and peered at it. We didn't know where Ficara was; we knew only that we didn't want to go there.

We saw a column of men from F Company slipping around the corner of a building and turning at right angles away from the road and heading uphill. We didn't want to be the heroes of a lost platoon, so we joined the larger group of men.

That Mount Brolo went straight up. We tried to lessen the slope by edging across it diagonally but still we had to clutch at brush, dig our feet in and sometimes crawl on hands and knees. To climb alone would be exhausting enough, but to climb in a column, with the man ahead of you stepping on your hands, with others weak from diarrhea moving their bowels on the hillside above you or with some weary private losing his footing and sliding downhill and kicking you in the face; and then your chestbone swelling from climbing, your breath crushing out of you and all your strength gushing away at the very moment you have to go into battle—all this and heaven too—and the sun runs faster than your legs and the dawn shoots up in the sky with the speed of a bullet and tears off the protective dress of the night and reveals you there naked on the hillside.

Snap, snap, snap—the snipers' bullets rake our ranks and one strikes our best radio and wounds the carrier and knocks him down. We crouch low but keep on climbing; fear is the motor force that drives us upward.

Over a rocky pinnacle, over the top of the hill, onto a narrow plateau, breathing heavily but in relief; then we step into a ditch and eight Germans are lying there asleep under one blanket.

"*Kamerad*," yell the Germans, blinking their eyes, and they stumble to their feet with their hands up and terrified, confused looks on their faces.

An American private with a rifle sets them down under a tree and

eyes them narrowly but no one else gives them a glance. Everyone strikes at the rocky ground with picks, shovels, helmets. Clank! Clank! Clank! The men dig viciously at the earth and race to get below ground before enemy shells search out the hill. Whitehead and I have no digging implements and we are too weary to scrape at the ground with our helmets, so we examine the hills to our rear for any signs of the enemy. We don't have long to wait.

From the trees on the closest hills a car emerges and races down a gravel road. Like falling red beads, our tracers shower on the car and it bursts into flames and halts on the down slope of the road and burns.

A voice shouts: "Look, Germans—a whole bunch of them." We slide our eyes across a green carpet of trees down into a deep ravine and see there the continuation of the gravel road and a stone wall buttressing the hill above the road and figures slinking along the wall like those figures in the gangster movies.

Jimmie McKinney and Danny Conway shoot at the creeping men from the top of our hill and balls of red bounce off the wall and some of the figures flee and some stumble and fall down and writhe.

The German prisoners with us restlessly turn and some of them squirm and some bite their lips.

3

The sun came up bold and bright. Under its rays the Hollywood atmosphere of the battle gradually dissipated so that we could look around and see more clearly where we were.

It was a hot, hazy summer day. The beautiful sea which spread before the heights where we had set up our command post was veiled in the immediate distance by a fine mist that lifted every now and then, revealing a rocky island and beyond it the slender form of a cruiser which was moving restlessly back and forth some miles out to sea. The little town of Brolo with its gray, red-tiled houses and its crenelated stone tower—where on one side stood our Company C and on the other stood German trucks disgorging infantry—was at the foot of the hill. On our west, in a bay formed by the jutting rock of Cape Orlando, lay fishing boats and, closer at hand washed by a gentle baby-blue sea, a sandy beach which led up to green vineyards in a graceful curve. It was a delightful spot where lovers might have

come for a picnic, or a poetic boy to read Homer and dream of the Isles of Greece.

From the top of the hill overlooking the same sea that Odysseus once sailed, Colonel Bernard, attended by an artillery observer, was examining the position through his field glasses; a few paces off by the headquarters radio set, Major Fargo, who had just come back from a reconnoitering expedition, sat in a half-dug foxhole, offering slivers of cheese to a small group who, cut off from their rations below on the beaches, crowded around him.

The artillery observer was pointing out something to the colonel who examined it carefully with his field glasses.

"The angle is too low for my guns," the observer was saying.

"That's right," the colonel agreed, with much annoyance as he laid down the field glasses. "They're going to attack Company E and we'll have to get something on them."

Even with the naked eye the enemy's tanks could be seen edging up the road toward the town of Brolo.

"There are at least five and probably seven Mark VI's there," said Major Fargo who had just scouted the hill. "We've got to get something on them right away."

The major was picking up the phone to call someone when Private Laverne Lunore tramped up to the command post and, stepping before the colonel, said: "We've got to have mortar ammunition. We've shot all ours."

"Call up the ammunition dump on the beach and have them send some mortar ammo up here as quick as possible," the colonel said to Fargo. As he gave this order, a shell sang overhead and fell with a deafening metallic roar on the forward slope of our hill where it led down to the road; a cloud of smoke showed where it had fallen and burst in the middle of our lines. In a moment a volley of tracer bullets shot into the hillside on the same spot and the leaves and weeds burned so that we soon were ringed with a brush fire.

The fire temporarily blocked our ammunition carriers and though they still tried to struggle through the smoke toward us, most of them were enveloped on the hillside in a cloud of bullets and we never heard from them again.

Bernard bit his lip. "Looks a little pinched," he said and eyed me narrowly. "The navy's got to do something."

He walked to the phone and shouted to a navy artillery spotter at

the other end of the line: "I must have something immediately. Now! I mean Now. This is urgent." He banged down the phone and we all sat and waited. Bullets were singing over the top of the hill and whining close by our ears, so Whitehead and I repaired to a foxhole which two of the German prisoners were in the act of digging.

The prisoners seemed a very good type of German. One—let's call him Hans—was big and burly, about twenty-five, with a simple open look in his blue eyes that a boy from the farm might have. The other, Fritz, was thin and wiry, about twenty-one, with wavy, brown hair and a happy debonair look about his lean and handsome face. Neither seemed to mind digging foxholes and both dug with a great deal of skill as if our artillery had taught them well.

The machine-gun fire was really heavy, so the four of us crouched together in the foxhole and looked at each other, thinking not so much that we were two Americans and two Germans as that we were four men wondering where the next bullet was going to hit.

It seemed unnatural to crouch there and say nothing, so in the little German I could remember I said: "*Krieg nichts ser gut*"—my pidgin German equivalent for "War is hell." This statement evidently met with German agreement, for they pinched their noses between their fingers as if they wanted to indicate that war had a very bad smell, indeed.

Once when our planes came over so close that it seemed as if they might accidentally bomb us, one of the Germans spread his handkerchief on the ground and indicated with words and gestures that this was the signal they used when their own German planes seemed about to bomb them. They seemed to think that we ought to adopt this signal and it was evident that our planes worried them.

We were in a peculiar position in relation to our prisoners. Our men were so busy fighting that scarcely anyone had time to watch them. Then the German tanks might break through our lines at any moment and we might become prisoners ourselves. We understood this and I think the Germans did, too. Some of our men found the possibility a source of bitter humor and one American soldier called to us:

"You'd better make that trench small 'cause they're going to make you dig one twice as big."

The American doughboy's words soon took on a very real meaning, for German tanks, having entered the town of Brolo from the

east, were now striking toward our infantry platoon guarding the bottom of the hill on the west.

Over a phone at the bottom of the hill, Lieutenant James Osgard, leader of the platoon, called out: "I can't last five more minutes without help."

We looked at each other with a sense of futility, but Major Lyn Fargo, without changing expression, answered Osgard back: "In five minutes you're going to get help. Hang on."

As Fargo banged the phone down with an air of finality, I looked at him in puzzled amazement. Why deceive Osgard? From where could help come, and how could Osgard hang on? Our lines were about to be smashed. That was clear, and everyone knew it. We just sat there and waited for Osgard to be overrun. One minute. Two minutes. Three minutes. Osgard's life was slowly running out.

BOOM! Somewhere, in an indeterminate direction out at sea, there was a dull reverberation, and then a shell sang overhead and fell down with a clatter into the stone houses of Brolo at the foot of the hill.

Again and yet again that dull booming sounded out at sea. And after each boom from the sea there was a corresponding quick, screeching roar overhead and a bursting clatter in the valley below. Startled, the men arose from their foxholes, crept to the edge of the hill and stared wide-eyed at the scene below.

Clouds of white smoke were pouring out of the town, penetrating into the ravines and covering the trees and lower slopes of the hill, and a milky-white fog hid everything from view.

"Ain't that the goddamdest thing you ever saw?" said a voice and then everyone was standing up and cheering and slapping each other on the back and saying:

"The goddam navy. The good old navy. Jesus, there ain't nothin' like navy guns." The impossible had suddenly become possible. The navy had saved our infantry.

Sucking on his dry pipe, the colonel grinned maliciously. "That'll teach the bastards," he said. "I bet every one of their tanks is knocked out."

But the colonel was wrong. The German tanks under cover of the heavy smoke clouds had evidently been able to evacuate the town, for an hour or so later they came slowly edging up the road from the east, but this time very cautiously as if they had been taught a lesson.

Simultaneously, we received a threat from the opposite direction. Captain Ralph Asman, running out of his observation post in a thicket at the edge of the hill, reported that enemy trucks were hauling pieces up the road from the west.

"What do you want me to do, piss on them?" asked Bernard.

"They're pulling them in one at a time and by dusk they're going to have a bunch of guns and tanks in there," said Fargo seriously.

"That's fine," said the colonel. "I'll fix that." He meant to call on the navy again, but those vessels somewhere out at sea were parading up and down the length of the coast, firing at targets of opportunity such as cars and tanks wherever they saw them; we couldn't call them back for the fires had burnt out our telephone lines and we couldn't contact that naval spotter. So we just sat on the side of the hill and helplessly watched the Germans bringing up their guns and calmly unlimbering them from trucks. The trap was tightening on both sides.

We wondered about our men on the flats below and how they were faring. But now on the hill it was getting bad, too. We were pinned there and couldn't move. And nothing could move to us either, not ammunition or food or water. Because the sun had grown implacably hot, the lack of water at times seemed worst of all. Half a mile away, a small spring trickled out of a mountain but it trickled with such pitiless slowness that men, watching with drooping lips and thirsting eyes and waiting vainly in line for five hours, had at last come away with empty canteens and more desperately parched throats.

We needed water now for the wounded, too, for as the fighting grew heavier, they were staggering up the hill, bloody and gasping and turning our command post into a hospital. The medics bandaged them swiftly with professional quietness and then lay them in foxholes where they broiled in the sun and once in a while cried for water, but otherwise remained silent.

Once a medic, maculate and spotted with blood, led a fellow up the hill who had been blinded by a shell. The medic seemed almost as weary as the wounded man. "If that's what hell is like," he said, "I'm going to be a churchgoer after this." He passed his hand over his eyes and then said again: "You know, I couldn't get the badly wounded off the road in time so I stuck them in a building and locked the door. The Germans will never find them."

"Will we?" asked a voice. There was no answer.

Toward the end of the afternoon our communications went out one by one. Enemy artillery smashed our beach-to-ship radio. Snipers knocked out our wireless link with the regiment and division. Brush fires burned our telephone wires between the command post and the beach and between companies. All that Bernard in the CP knew was what runners, working up and down the cliff, through enemy gunfire and through the flames of the burning brush, brought him. This news was meager enough, but soon it almost ceased as runner after runner failed to return. With the loss of communications and the consequent inability to contact the navy our road defenses crumbled. A little after five o'clock heavy Mark VI tanks brushed through our thin infantry line, knocked out our self-propelled artillery and swept away our beach defenses. What we had feared all day had at last happened. We were cut off and trapped on the hill.

Desperately, Bernard ordered Company E and Company F, the latter having been sent below as a reinforcement, to get back up the hill as best they could. Even that seemed a forlorn hope and we never expected to see most of those men again.

Our situation was briefly this. Isolated on Mount Brolo, we were without food and almost out of ammunition. A few of us had water in our canteens; the rest had none. And now the water supply at the little spring was cut off, for the Germans held it under machine-gun fire. To put it mildly, our position seemed embarrassing.

Colonel Bernard had three alternatives:

1. He could make a break for the hills to our rear and seek to escape in small parties back to our main division forces.
2. He could surrender.
3. He could make a last-ditch stand on Mount Brolo and try to hold on until help arrived.

Bernard chose this last alternative.

Over his one remaining phone he announced to A Company commander: "We are now preparing to make one of Bernard's last stands. We will go into a tight circle on the hill and defend ourselves with rifles."

He hung up the phone, leaned back on his elbows and grinned wickedly. Having made his decision he seemed to be pleased by it.

A soldier, seeing his grin, edged up to him and said: "Excuse me, Sir, have you heard anything from the Seventh and the Fifteenth?"

"Sure, see that ridge over there?" said Bernard, indicating a high

promontory about four miles away. "The Seventh is in that valley and will be here before long. There's nothing to worry about."

I looked at the ridge. Shells were bursting on it. Those shells came from our guns which might be another five or ten miles away beyond the ridge. That made nine to fourteen miles in all that the Seventh had to go over the hills and against the enemy to reach us. That would take a long time and anything could happen. I looked at Bernard. He looked back at me, smiling quizzically as if to say: "Well, what would you have told him?"

4

So there we were in this Indian-cowboy setting, on top of this Journey's End hill, with a drama-conscious colonel about to reenact that old-time favorite refurbished and renamed for the occasion "Bernard's Last Stand."

Well, it would be a good show, all right. But it was too stagey. Everything was too goddam self-conscious. Never mind about the encouragement. Where were the other regiments? They were to have been here by nine this morning or at least by noon. But where were they? The soldiers were astonished and irritated. Yes, where were the goddam reinforcements? If they didn't come soon, we were as good as rats in a trap. No guns! No tanks! Almost out of ammunition! And what had happened to Company E and Company F in the flats? Dead, no doubt, or taken prisoner. And here we were stuck with this hill.

Lieutenant Herbert Stranahan strode across the top of the hill shouting: "Everyone get a rifle and get down there on those slopes."

The men moved slowly. The lieutenant had to repeat his order. "Everyone—I don't care what your job is—get a rifle and get down there on those slopes. Those Heinies are going to be all through us in a minute if we don't stop them. Get down on those slopes."

The men came out of their foxholes, and with exaggerated stagey glances, first to the right and then to the left, weaved toward the forward slopes of the hill. As they went, they still swore fiercely. Not a man sent to help them! So it was death after all. And what for? The whole Mediterranean navy was available, wasn't it? Where the hell had that cruiser gone to? And the air force. Jesus! The air force! Performing strategic missions—knocking down factories and churches and people's homes. All those well-publicized theories.

God, those big boys thought they'd figured out something new. And the *Readers Digest*. Bomb Germany out of the war! Back there in their comfortable offices, they had it all figured out. Strategic bombing—that was the stuff. And if anything was left over? Why, yes, we might give the troops a little support.

Angrily, the soldiers thrust out toward the edge of the hill. Watching them recalled to me a song the soldiers of the Eighth Army used to sing:

Poor guys are dyin'
For bastards like you.

Just then the soldiers heard the sound of approaching planes. I did not hear them, but I could tell; for I saw the soldiers looking back over their shoulders at the sky. Then I heard them, too, far off but coming fast.

"About time," growled a soldier, but he was grinning.

"This may save us," another grudgingly admitted.

Hammering hard, they came closer. The air was wracked on all sides now. Nearer and louder, louder and faster, now buzzing and grinding, now in a high, shrill, nerve-consuming whine, they came toward the top of the hill.

"Christ! they're diving right for us," said a voice. "Those are Heinies!"

Wildly I leaped into a foxhole. There was a wounded boy from Indiana there. Squatting, I looked up and saw a plane steeply diving toward us. We wrestled around the trench, trying to get flat.

The plane was very huge now. The star on its wing was white and big and clear. Poof! My breath gushed out of me in relief. Our planes! No doubt, they were going to bomb the Germans on the lower slope of the hill.

I saw five other planes swerving sharply in the air and falling down and plunging one after the other toward us in steep power dives. Then they swooped down on us with an exultant scream and moaned and whistled around the hill and swept away again while strings of bombs drove across our vision. I heard them *thrush-thrushing*; far away, remote in the upper air, then howling, rocking the branches of the barren olive trees and now yelling in loud shrieks. The inside of my stomach rotted with fear. There was a frightful explosion. Good Jesus! Our own planes were bombing us.

I had a queer thought: "That sonofabitch who said: 'There ain't

no atheists in foxholes,' sold the public a piece of goods." I didn't have the slightest desire to pray. For a hundredth of a second a nameless happiness welled within me and I exulted in the incorruptibility of my soul.

Then the planes hammered into my ears again, there was the scream of the air splitting apart and the whole earth rose up as one billowing mass and struck me. Smoke was choking me, the smell of gas was nauseating me, bits of trees and flying fragments were falling on me and everything was a red black roaring. But I was not dead, for I could hear a man shrilly screaming. His anguished, maniacal yelling penetrated through the walls of the deep blackness that inclosed me. I felt as if I were in a closet and I wanted to beat down the door and get out to that screaming man. The red-blackness was now a dirty, soupy gray and the man's shrieking had taken on a deeper undertone and he was howling so that words could be distinguished. "Mutter! Mutter! Mutter!" Once, twice, three times he howled in German.

Slowly the air cleared. Through a smoky veil, five yards away, I made out the prisoner Fritz, groveling on his knees, his right arm hanging by a thread of flesh like a swinging pendulum from his shoulder and blood spouting onto his clothes and spraying onto the blackened earth. Hans; with a pale and frightened face, was running around him, grunting gutturally, looking first at Fritz and now at me with a pleading glance.

Another German behind Fritz suddenly raised his head and yowled, loudly crying the tale of his wound. An American sergeant seized a shovel and ran at him, hissing fiercely: "Pipe down! or I'll bash your brains in."

Several American dead and wounded lay sprawled in various attitudes by their foxholes, caught by surprise before they could get to them. None of the American wounded said a word of complaint.

A voice behind me called: "Hey, Daily, come here! My hand's been shot off."

Down the slope a little way, a young boy, wavering from side to side with a dazed look in his eyes, abruptly fell to the ground. His helmet came off and rolled down the hill and he clutched at his head, crying: "Oh, my head, my head!" There was not a wound or a mark on him, but he held tightly to his head, crying. Don Whitehead rolled him gently over into a foxhole and a medic jabbed him with morphine and his cries grew less.

Then the battalion chaplain knelt on the ground and prayed by the dead.

We lay the wounded and few slain in the rocky foxholes around the CP. The sun was sinking below the hills, and darkness mingled with the dust and haze, forming a veil over the dead and dying.

Out of the twilight gloom, about eight o'clock, small crowds of men suddenly materialized and converged on the CP from several directions. In three and fours, wounded and unwounded, with bloody, maculate uniforms, and all with fire-blackened hands and faces, they came through the haze like ghosts, some crawling, some stumbling and all bent over with the weight of weariness.

The soldiers around the CP peered at these strange figures with deep suspicion, rifles held ready; then they broke into a run to meet the newcomers; for these were the men of E and F Companies who had escaped from the flats below.

One soldier hugged another and pounded him on the back.

"Jesus, boy! you made it. Christ! you got away."

"Blow me down! I'm glad to see you."

These and other comments were uttered unashamedly round the hill. But there was not much spare time for rejoicing. The fugitives from the plain soon joined Bernard's last-ditch circle and went out with the others on the forward slopes of the hill with rifles.

Some couldn't make it, though. When they reached the command post, they fell down and sobbed, while others trembled so violently with exhaustion that the medics had to fill them full of morphine. After the brutal battle on the plains below and the grueling climb to escape up Mount Brolo, we sympathized with them and understood their collapsing. A big and oversized company commander who was tottering back and forth on his feet in the middle of the CP abruptly fell down beside Colonel Bernard and thrashed the ground, his weak body conquered by overcharged emotion. A medic rolled back his sleeve, preparing to jab him with a morphine needle. The captain staggered wildly to his feet and, throwing off restraining hands, he yelled savagely: "Leave me alone; I got to fight this off myself." But that exhausted him, and again he slumped down, shaking convulsively, and sobbed.

One by one, reinforcements from the lost companies below made their way uphill and rejoined us. A boy staggering under the weight of a heavy mortar bore it proudly toward the CP.

"How many rounds you got there, son?" said Bernard.

"Twenty-two."

"Good boy!" said the colonel, clapping his hands. "Just put that mortar here in the last-stand circle and we'll knock hell out of those Heinies."

"You ain't kiddin'," said the soldier, and quickly he set up his mortar.

The gun-loader shoved each shell down into the mortar; the shell came out with a sharp bang, whistling softly away, and Major Fargo checked each one off on his fingers. "That's one, that's two, that's three."

"Lordy, that's a pleasant whistle," said Bernard, grinning.

Lieutenant Lyle Davidson looked enviously at the mortars.

"Guess I'm outside the circle," he said, "but what the hell, I'm just an artilleryman with no artillery!"

The colonel jabbed him in the ribs. "We haven't got the strength, but goddamit, we got the will to go after them. At least, that bastard's going to know he's been in a war. Why I bet," he suddenly slapped his knee, "he's so damn scared now that he only wants to get away. He won't dare come up the hill after us."

"Well, it's our hill, isn't it?" said Fargo. "We took it, didn't we? It's our property, isn't it?"

"Yes, and possession's nine points of the law," said Bernard. "American law anyway." He grinned and sucked on his dead pipe.

On a sudden instinct the colonel and I went to the edge of the hill and peered down in the darkness to the road running along the beach below. Over the whole narrow flat land, previously so sparkling with its blue curving bay and sandy beach and green vineyards, had now spread a damp mist of smoke. Here and there in the dimness gleamed the fires of burning trucks, and once in a while could be heard the rumble of lorries moving from the east toward the west as if the Germans were in a hurry to get out. In the dark everything had turned ugly and the bright charm of the day was gone; yet in that moment I think both Bernard and I felt instinctively that the Germans were licked and were moving out without daring to attack us.

Whitehead and I huddled together in a foxhole. The night grew dark. A thin gray fog came out of the sea, crept over the hill and shook us with its cold touch. The moon rose over the hill, the wind blew through the olive trees and bullets hissed through the air. They hummed close overhead like bees, *panked* against the hard ground

and churned into confusion the hill, which swarmed with figures running and cursing and falling down. Beneath the bullets, the men crouched in their holes, digging at the rocky ground—clank! clank! clank!—a melancholy, graveyard sound. I listened to them. My heart ached with sympathy.

But the men might have spared themselves the trouble. The next morning not a living trace of the enemy could be discerned. Around the bottom of our fire-blackened hill a jeep was slowly cruising and from it a voice floated up.

"I got ambulances and truckloads of food waiting around the corner for you. Come on down!"

It was over then.

Bernard's Last Stand would have to be postponed till another time.

I looked down on the bay formed by the jutting rock of Cape Orlando and I could see the little babbling waves of the Mediterranean running after each other and mingling and breaking across the sandy beach, which, reaching out its graceful curving arms, seemed to say:

"Come on down here to me. It's a lovely day; I want to hug you all."

* * *

A week later, as Bernard had promised, Messina fell. Sicily was conquered.

Chapter VIII

Salerno

"If no one were allowed to pass an opinion on the events of war except at a moment when he is benumbed by frost, suffocating with heat and thirst or overwhelmed by hunger and fatigue, we should certainly have fewer judgments that would be correct objectively; but they would at least be so subjectively; that is, they would contain the exact relation between the person giving the judgment and the object."

—VON CLAUSEWITZ

IN SICK bay aboard a transport returning from Italy:—The Germans knew we were coming and waited for us. All they had to do was study the map and see that the obvious place for us to strike was south of Naples. Even correspondents who were not briefed before the operation and who possessed no special information guessed on the basis of logic that that was where we would land. On September 7, while we were steaming toward our objective, the Swiss radio announced that an Allied invasion fleet was carrying the Fifth Army toward Naples. The day before our landing our LST's were bombed continuously. Probably the German air force had us under observation at all times. The enemy knew not only approximately where we were going to land but when.

There was no possibility even of a tactical surprise as in Sicily. What was needed was an overwhelming display of power at a concentrated point—a naval bombardment to clear the beaches so that the Germans couldn't strike against our assault waves while they were still on the water.

As late as five thirty on the afternoon of September 8, the naval commander of the forces I was with said that a bombardment was scheduled. Yet it never came off. Perhaps the army, wishing to rely on surprise, didn't want the bombardment. If that is so, it was a repetition of tactics that already had been used in initial and later

commando landings in Sicily. A repetition of tactics as a general rule is bad. It plays into enemy hands.

Perhaps the announcement of the Italian surrender made the authorities change their minds. Maybe neither of these reasons is correct. But whatever the reason we had little or no supporting fire on the American part of the beach. That announcement of the Italian surrender which we heard at six thirty on our radios had an unfortunate effect on the troops. We all cheered the news and shouts from the whole fleet echoed over the Mediterranean as we followed one of our surfaced submarines and swung around her close into the coast of Italy. But too many officers and men thought it was all over but the shouting. Some of them had not been in combat before and some complained that they wouldn't have a chance to fight.

One or two older officers tried to persuade the men out of this attitude. A general said: "Instead of Italians you're going to have Germans on the beach firing on you."

A colonel said: "This alleged good news is bad news for us. Unless the officers go down into the holds and give the men a fight talk, they're going in there with their hands down, but, by God, I'm going in there with both fists swinging, and I'm going to kill the first bastard that fires on me."

But the talk did little good. Everything seemed to be going too smoothly. While we were still under way, our ship slung boats and even ducks over the side. As soon as the anchor was down the boats of the first assault wave were away and circling in the water. It was the smoothest debarkation I'd ever seen. It was too smooth.

The navy was so skillful the army couldn't get excited. As we circled under a half moon around and around between our transports, I remembered how tense the veteran First Division had been before the landing on Sicily. Now there was no tenseness among these soldiers.

"Why should we be afraid?" said a private. I couldn't answer him. I couldn't say it was wiser to be afraid. Lack of fear is the mark of well-trained and disciplined troops but it is also the mark of inexperience. These men were not scared and I didn't like it.

We were nearly ten miles from the beach. The continuous circling in the water was tedious and some of us fell asleep. When we woke, the yellow moon was turning orange and growing dimmer, the sky to our left was lit by flashes of gunfire where the British were supposed to be attacking Salerno and now and then a huge glare

ripped apart the darkness as if a ship were exploding out to sea.

But before us all was quiet and dark. We broke our circle and headed in a column toward a shore which we could not see but which still looked safe.

Above the roar of our motors we did not hear the approach of that first shell. But I saw the flame leap out of the boat next to me and simultaneously the crash shook our boat and it jerked once or twice and then went on. Abruptly, I sat down in the bottom of the boat, not as a precaution, but because I was afraid. I heard a soldier say: "I saw a shell close like that in training once," and I was more afraid.

We were still a good distance from the beach; we hadn't even reached our line of departure; yet the German guns were on us already. As we learned later, the Germans were so sure of where we were going to land that they brought their defenses right onto our beach. Trees, brush and all obstacles were cut down so as to obtain a clear field of fire. Nothing was left to chance. Machine guns fired only in certain zones, the zones interlocked. Almost on the water's edge in some cases only fifty yards apart, machine guns threatened death to anyone coming out of the boats. Back of those were mortars. Only 200 yards from the beach 88's were employed.

This was the third landing I had made and it was the hardest. As we came abreast of the navy patrol vessel marking our line of departure, the assault waves bunched up and shells fell in among them. We needed no order. We broke, the column went into a skirmish position and throbbed toward shore like so many racing boats close together side by side with motors roaring and spray flying.

Shells were flashing in the water, flames were yellowing the sky and bullets were slapping into the boat. They snapped over our heads, rattled against the boat sides like hail and beat at the ramp door, seeming to say: "When you open the door, I'll get you, get you, get you." The coxswain shouted: "Get ready"; the boat shuddered and the ramp creaked open. A man leaped into the void and his legs flailed the sea which was babbling and breaking in a white froth on the white sandy beach. I stepped down. My legs sank down to their knees and my feet touched the sandy soil of Italy. At last, I was on the continent of Europe.

That great and significant affair was a thing of insignificance to me then. I was possessed by no thought of liberating a continent, but only by the frenzied fancy that yellow tracers were flashing on

the left and right, that flares were curving in golden parabolas onto the beach, that the boats were illuminated and gray and ugly and they were disgorging dim and menacing figures and everything was unfriendly, miserable and wet.

I stumbled, fell on my face in the water, got up again, crawled on the beach and lay panting with a score of soldiers, went on again through sand dunes and halted again before a line of barbed wire.

We were supposed to be the second wave but no one seemed ahead of us. There were no wire cutters among any of us so we held the wire for each other and crawled through.

Flares shot up and down. They were too close and bright so we lay down. From the indeterminate shadows around us anxious voices were yelling as if in pain. I thought the Germans were howling but soon I distinguished the words, "Help, help." Momentarily I felt horrified at what might be going on from where those voices were calling in vain for assistance.

We went on in jerks, throwing ourselves to the ground at the snap of a bullet, getting up again in anxiety when we saw how little distance we had covered and how soon the sun would come up on this denuded flat ground.

Obstacles clutched at us everywhere. We broke through the rail fences that had been interlaced with barbed wire, able to move only in single file for we never could find enough wire cutters. At one barricade, after we had cut our way through, we lost our balance and tumbled into a ditch filled with water and fecal matter up to our necks. When we dragged ourselves out on the other side, we had to clutch and hang onto another barrier of wire until others found the way through.

Lost, stumbling through an unfamiliar country, beset by uncertainty and slowing down from fatigue, we at last broke through our eighth barbed-wire barrier and just before dawn emerged on a macadam highway. A few miles beyond it was a high hill which we were to have seized before daylight but which the Germans now undoubtedly held and from it looked down on us. Toward this hill the battalion commander urged his companies which were coming by in groups of ten and twenty, having become separated from each other in the dark.

In a little while the commander meandered off to the right down the highway.

"There's no one there but Germans," I said, for I had seen their machine guns firing from that direction.

"Oh, we're supposed to have somebody there," he said and continued walking away from the flank of our troops.

"The plans of mice and men . . ." I thought; and then I followed him. There were only he, his walkie-talkie operator and I.

Any man who has been through numerous battles has a kind of instinct that enables him to sense a dangerous situation—a sort of smelling of the enemy, as it were. I was gripped by that indefinable sense of danger now and I followed the colonel cautiously and kept twenty or thirty yards behind him.

Abruptly, he turned around and came back. "I thought I saw vehicles," he said. I wanted to run back to our troops, but as the colonel wasn't running, I only walked faster.

We heard the truck coming and we turned around and it was right on top of us. We yelled: "Stop," and fire flashed from the colonel's hand. The truck halted in front of us, and we yelled: "Get out. Come on, surrender. Get out." With his pistol the colonel put a bullet in the back tire, but there was no other sound or movement.

Just then, a few paces to the rear, the walkie-talkie operator fired his rifle. In the flash I saw a pair of legs on the opposite side of the truck.

Armed only with a short bayonet which I had taken from a prisoner, I felt foolish standing in the middle of the road. So I climbed over a low stone wall and behind it I began working my way toward the front of the truck. My intention was to get around on that side so I could tell the colonel where the enemy was; for he could only see the rear of the truck.

Crawling behind the wall I came abreast of the truck door. Through an open window I dimly saw the figure of a man, slumped down, as if he had been killed or wounded or was now trying to avoid both. Still behind the wall, I made my way beyond the front of the truck and peered over the stones. The door on the far side of the truck was open. On the road beneath it lay a figure, on its back, with arms outflung, stiff and quiet, like a dead man.

"Got 'em!" I thought. Then—I don't know what made me do it—perhaps the malarial daze I've been working in ever since Sicily—grasping my bayonet, I slid first one leg and then another onto the top of the wall.

Something like a baseball bat hammered into my leg. At the same

instant there was a loud report and a burst of flame across the road, and dimly I saw a figure.

Without any volition of my own I flew off the wall; a loud, involuntary howl of anguish escaped my lips and I went through the air and rolled down and over back of the wall.

A cloud of darkness enveloped me and a great weight pushed my leg into the ground and the leg swelled and puffed and tried to push off the weight. I tried to rise but fell back. Blood was slipping down my right leg. I struggled but could not rise.

Where were the rest of our soldiers? There was no one about.

Fear shook me like a fever. I yelled: "Colonel, Colonel, I've been wounded." When there was no answer I felt a rush of shame at crying out so loud. Then I became so mad at myself I wept. "Damn fool! Damn fool!" I said. "China, Burma, Egypt, Tunisia, Sicily and goddam you, you expose yourself like a soldier seeing his first battle."

The pain grew sharper and I thought: "You can die here." After an effort I got my tin of sulfanilamide pills out of my first-aid kit. They had been soaked in water and there was only a floury paste left. I tried to pour it in my mouth, but most of it went down my neck.

The colonel came back and bent over me. "Are you hit bad, fella?" he said.

"I can't move," I said. "Keep down, that fellow is just across the road."

He went away and came back in a minute with a soldier. "He'll find you a company medic," he said. They both went away then. I saw the colonel striking up through the fields toward the hills, and in a wave of self-pity I thought: "He didn't even say good-by."

In a moment the soldier came back and I grinned inside as I saw a boy with a red cross on his arm accompanying him.

"Morphine," I said. "You'll get it, fella," he said, but all he did was ask my name and what time I was wounded. I had a hard time making him understand I didn't belong to any unit and didn't have any serial number. He shook his head and tied a card with its information through my buttonhole. I'd seen this simple act performed before and even written about it, but now to be tagged myself on the battlefield gave me a queer feeling.

"Now just where are you hit?" said the medic and he picked up my leg. Using it as the handle of a whip, he flung my body into the

air and then the leg blew up and expanded and grew into a balloon and my head and my foot dangled from either end of the balloon.

I screamed. Gradually, my head and shoulders touched the ground again, but my leg was still in the air, all grown huge and rocking back and forth above me.

"Let it down," I moaned, but it wouldn't come down.

Through a mist of pain I heard a voice say: "Got to get a doctor." I saw a back disappearing and I cried out at it: "What have you done to my leg, what have you done?"

They'd left me and they'd left my leg still in the air. Perhaps they had rested it on my other leg. If so, I could push it off with my hands. I dug in my elbows and raised myself, then pushed my hands into the ground and sat up. My wounded leg was doubled up but flat on the ground. I groaned.

There seemed nothing I could do now. But remembering my first-aid bandage, I slid it under my leg and felt around with my fingers for the wound. One by one my fingers slipped into a sticky gap. There seemed to be no end to the gap, and I stopped probing. I didn't want to know how big the hole was any more.

To get rid of the pain I closed my eyes. When I opened them again there were four medics standing in front of me.

"Morphine," I said.

"You're talking," said a dark-haired boy, and he jabbed me in the arm. Then two of them grabbed my shoulders, a third pulled on my leg, and the dark-haired fellow prepared a splint.

"The wounded aren't supposed to cry," I said, disgusted with myself.

"Aw, you ain't done so bad," said one kindly.

They were pulling hard on me now so I had to keep talking.

"What's your name? Where you from?" I said to the dark-haired fellow who was sliding a splint under my leg.

"John Fleischman, Philadelphia," he said, yanking my foot down toward the bottom of an iron frame.

He almost had me now, so I said: "Philadelphia. Hell, the Athletics are thirty-six games behind."

"Yeah." He yanked hard. My teeth chattered.

"Let's give him another shot of morphine," said a medic.

"I was with the Eighth Army. The British wouldn't moan like this," I said.

"Aw, nuts," they said, and laid me on a stretcher and tied my leg

to it and carried me out on the road and headed back up toward the halted German truck.

A wild panic flared inside me.

"No, no. Don't take me there. Only Germans are there."

"Take it easy," said the medics, as if they were speaking to a delirious child. "The ambulance will come up here and get you."

"The ambulance can't get here. None of our soldiers are here. Don't put me by that truck."

"Take it easy. Our soldiers are all up here."

"Why don't you believe me?" I wailed in desperation.

They laid me on the side of the road near the truck and then they laid the wounded German boy near me and then they went away.

I heard the motor of a car approaching, and I lay there listening like some Cassandra waiting for a dreaded prophecy to come true. The Chinese have a saying, "Fear a devil and there is a devil." I had been afraid of a devil and here it was coming now.

It snorted and poked its head around the truck and stopped twenty yards away.

It was a German *volkswagon*.

There were six men in it. One got out.

Can he be coming at me, I thought. Suppose the wounded German cries out. Will he come over here then and take me prisoner or will he kill me in a fit of anger? Why? I who am unarmed and helpless.

The German soldier looked at the dead body in the road and then got back in the *volkswagon*. I grinned all over. I knew exactly what he was feeling. He was afraid. He talked to the five other men and soon the *volkswagon* turned around and went away.

The medics, excited and out of breath, ran up from the opposite direction.

"Gosh, that was a German car, wasn't it? We better get you out of here."

Picking up the stretcher, they hustled away from the truck and the stretcher was jostled as shells arched overhead toward the beach and the bearers quickened their pace.

I saw a two-story stone building some twenty-five yards from the road and I said: "Put me behind there for shelter." They set me down behind it among a flock of chickens and put a stone under my head and went away.

After a while I heard a clanking on the road. Nearer and louder, louder and nearer it came. "Can our tanks have at last got here?" I thought. Then the clanking ceased.

They've stopped and maybe they'll pick me up, I hoped. Heavy machine guns burst sharply on the other side of the house. Clearing the road, I thought. But of whom?

Once more the clanking started. And now it was passing by the front of the house. Propping myself in a sitting position I watched with popping eyes a column of tanks, with turrets clamped down, moving slowly down the road, their guns revolving round and round.

They don't look like ours, I thought, and then I saw they were yellow-brown and not green and I knew they weren't ours.

It's a strange thing to be wounded and watch the enemy's tanks go by and not be able to take cover or get up and run away or help yourself in any manner. I think if I had been in the same position but not wounded, I would have been more frightened than I was then. As it was, I couldn't influence matters—I had no will and no responsibility. Anything that happened was just up to fate.

The tanks were moving slowly and they weren't firing and they were in column and not in skirmish formation. I bet they're retreating to the north so the British won't cut them off, I thought.

I looked at the sky and then lower down around me. A chicken pecked at my stretcher and then hopped on my stomach. In a neighboring farmyard a cow switched her tail and munched contentedly at some weeds. An untended horse wandered inquisitively among neatly stacked bundles of hay. How peaceful it all must have been! I tried to be philosophical about my predicament and I recalled Prince Andrew looking at the sky above the field of Austerlitz and thinking nothing matters. But I couldn't feel that way. The sky was buzzing with planes; shells were flying close beneath them, but I scarcely gave them a second thought. They seemed far away and impersonal but the road was near by and the enemy seemed very intimate and all I could think of was I wanted to get away from this road.

In an hour the medics were standing above me again.

They said: "We hid in the ditch by the road. They stopped and fired on both sides. The bullets ricocheted. Jeezus, we were scared."

"I thought you were killed. I'm glad to see you. Take me down to the beach."

"It's too far. None of our vehicles got ashore. There's no ambulances."

"I don't want an ambulance. This isn't a training maneuver. Get me near the beach. Somebody will put me on a boat."

"They're shelling the beach."

"Aw, what's a few shells? There's plenty of ditches along the way. Let's get away from this road. This is no place for a wounded war correspondent and unarmed medics."

"It's safer here." In the end they won. They went away. I stayed. Before they left, I had them write their names in my notebook. They are still there: John Fleischman, Walter Junkun, Fred Zinman, Dewey Carlson. The doctor on this ship says that by putting a splint on my leg they probably saved me from losing it, so this is my thanks.

For two hours I lay there alone. Once in a while I saw soldiers advancing cautiously from bush to bush in the fields to the north and then I yelled: "Right flank. There's no one on your right flank." Some would look at me indifferently, not having heard and not caring. Others would come running over and ask: "What's that you say, the right?" Then they would all veer away to the left, leaving the right more unprotected than ever.

Once a group of four or five soldiers passed right beside me and one placed a pack of cigarettes on my chest. "Tough going," he said and passed on.

After some time a larger group of men came across the fields on the north and when I heard one of them shout: "Hey, Colonel," I propped myself up again.

A group of soldiers and officers with tommy guns and rifles were milling about a house next door. They shouted up at it, and when there was no answer, one of them shot a bullet into the door and the rest tried to kick it down. Several times I hollered at them: "Hey, come over here, will you? I'm wounded." But though they turned and looked at me they always turned away again and never made a motion toward me.

Pretty soon some of our jeeps—I forgot to mention that they had passed by an hour before—raced back from the direction which the tanks had taken. As they went by, the occupants yelled something to the group by the house next door and those men, to my astonishment, suddenly started running toward the beach, looking back over their shoulders in anxious alarm at the road.

When I saw them running away, I called as loud as I could: "Hey, Yankee soldier, Yankee soldier, I'm wounded. Hey, I'm wounded."

One or two paused and turned around as if they would come back to me and I yelled again but after hesitating for a moment they turned back and went the other way.

I fell back exhausted and very downhearted. I began to tremble and shake. Some time before, a passing soldier had felt my forehead and said: "You're awful cold." Now I really was cold. I wanted to get out of there more than ever.

I screwed my head around and looked back of me. There I also saw soldiers going toward the beach.

"Hey, hey! Yankee! American soldier! I'm wounded." Still the backs of the soldiers remained inexorably turned toward me and they went on toward the rear.

Suddenly, near the house a voice called: "Where are you?"

"Here, behind the house," I said, feeling as happy as I had all day.

A soldier ran around a corner of the house.

"Jeezus, are you all alone?"

"I've been here six hours. I'm cold."

He went away but was soon back with a young medic—he couldn't have been more than eighteen—who was puffing very hard as if he had run all the way to me, and who threw off his pack, mixed some powder and liquid, poured it into a glass and held the glass to my lips.

"Drink," he said. He was so earnest and so quick I felt glad all over in meeting him. I told him that someone had said an ambulance was coming but that I doubted it.

"The hell with the ambulance," he said. "If I can't get someone to help me, I'll carry you back myself," and he ran away to find someone.

A medic of higher rank from the battalion aid station came up and said no one could be spared to go back.

"We'll put you near the road where the ambulance can find you," he said. He gave me another shot of morphine and carried me to the front of the house and laid me under an overhead grapevine a few yards from the road.

Out of a large cylinder he took two bottles. One held powder, the other liquid. He mixed the two up in a bottle which he hung to the grape arbor by a string and prepared to inject me with plasma.

As he was jabbing rather unsuccessfully at the veins in my arm a

duck came roaring down the road, and from it, as it passed by, flew a chorus of voices.

"Tanks are coming. Tanks are coming."

Looking up, the medic said to his helper: "I don't think they'd harm us." Then he jabbed again at my arm. This time a jeep rushed by and the passengers shouted the same refrain: "Tanks are coming."

"It would be safer behind the building," said someone, so they carried me back there again.

Plasma drips into your veins drop by drop. A bottleful takes an unbearably long time to get in. With my eyes I watched the line of liquid in the bottle; with my ears I listened for the approaching tanks. The brown line in the bottle didn't seem to move at all, but the tanks were coming in very fast, throwing shells as they came.

One of the shells flew over with a quick whistle and fell a few yards away by the corner of the building. A small black cloud showed where it fell and exploded. In the opposite direction, through the grapevines, I could see one of our heavy guns coming up the road. So this gun and the tanks were about to duel with each other at close range and we were right in the middle.

At this time there were two Italian officers wandering around in the garden and I was idly watching them, wondering if they had heard about the armistice, when I thought they could very well carry me toward the beach if they were willing. I made the appropriate signs and motions and they quickly signified they would do it.

The tanks were coming nearer and a shell flew uncomfortably close. By now two-thirds of the bottle of plasma was inside me and with the medics' agreement I decided to forego the rest.

The Italians picked me up. I had been vomiting off and on for the last hour and I did so again and the Italians looked at me with sorrowful eyes.

The Italians weren't very strong and they set me down to rest every hundred yards or so but they were willing bearers and they kept on going toward the sea, though shells were now coming down faster in the vicinity of the beach.

After about a mile I saw an artillery unit under some trees and a man with a red cross on his arm.

"Where can I go?" I said. He looked at the Italians and me strangely for a minute and then said: "Come in here. It's a long way to the beach." They laid me under an olive tree which is perhaps the

worst shade-giving tree in the world and in the sun I was violently ill again, retching every five or six minutes.

The medics there were tender and sympathetic. One said: "I can't find transportation anywhere. I'll help carry you to the beach myself."

So we started out again and this time there were four men on the stretcher. I must have been very heavy, limp as I was, and with the heavy steel frame. At last, they could go no further and put me down in a semicircle of stones that offered very good shelter. There was another wounded man there.

I couldn't believe it but an ambulance finally did drive up there and they loaded us in, first warning me to vomit in my helmet when I was sick.

The ambulance carried us to the first-aid station by the beach where doctors were in attendance. I have a hazy recollection that the dressing station consisted of a tent, but I am not sure. Maybe there was just a cleared space. Around it bloodstained men stood, sat or lay. Around the wounded, stretching everywhere over the beach, was strewn a profuse melange of guns, trucks, tanks, bulldozers, ducks and jeeps, and down by the beach with their mouths hanging in the water were landing craft of many sizes and shapes.

I saw all this in a blur and it didn't interest me much anyway, and I closed my eyes. When I opened them again, a major was standing over me.

"Tough day, doctor?" I asked. He sighed: "I'm supposed to be a surgeon, but I had to organize this beach evacuation."

He read my card: "Broken femur, hit in two places; patient has malaria; allergic to tetanus toxin." "I'm going to send you right out to the ship," he said.

The ambulance brought me to a landing craft, and with several other wounded I soon found myself alongside this ship, from the railing of which numerous healthy faces peered down on us.

A hook descended down over the boat and the sailors fastened lines around my stretcher and that of another man. A blond young doctor shinnied down a knotted line to see that the contraption wouldn't tip over when hoisted. When we came abreast of the rail, careful hands seized our stretchers and voices said: "Good work, soldier."

Sailors carried me through a hatchway and lay me in a long cor-

ridor where several men gathered and asked: "How'd they get you?"

I retched violently. As by now I had nothing on my stomach, my whole insides were sucked in by the action and I made a fearful racket that reverberated down the corridor and caused people to come running.

A hospital apprentice, named Anthony Vacanti, knelt by my side and said over and over again: "Take it easy, fella, you're in good hands, now."

"I ain't saying nothing. I'm only puking," I said.

They carried me to the operating table and cut off my clothes and then loosened the splint. Swift as a surprise my leg bent.

"Ow!" I howled, and turning my face away I bared my teeth and began to wriggle and twitch, moaning: "Ooh, ooh."

"For God's sake," said a young doctor at the foot of the table, "he can't stand that. Grab his leg and pull on it. Pull on it hard as you can."

So two or three of them pulled on my leg and a fellow held my shoulders and I locked my arms around his neck and we all pulled.

After a while I couldn't help smiling. They had no surprises left for me and I wasn't going to yowl any more. I suppose anyone on the operation table indulges in the most bromidic wisecracks to keep himself going. I know I did. I remember saying: "The way you hold onto that leg you'd think I was a chorus girl." It seems stupid now, but it seemed pretty good then.

They put me to bed. They were very tender about everything, these navy doctors and assistants. The next day we sailed from Italy.

As we were about to pull out, forty planes dive bombed us. Down in sick bay, listening to the thud of underwater explosions, I watched the walls to see when they would start shifting and I wondered what they'd ever do with the wounded if we started sinking. It seemed to me we were a nuisance.

The next day some E-boats tried to attack our convoy but they never got through. Now we seem pretty safe. I can't say any of us are so happy. There's a fellow in the bunk below me with a bullet in his spine and he can't move. On one side of me is a boy from Texas named Joe, who has a bullet in his stomach and he can't eat. They feed him every day through the veins, drop by drop, and it takes a long time. I can't see his face but we talk back and forth. When he isn't talking, Joe is moaning. Jack, across the room, never

makes a sound. He's lost a finger, got a broken hand and leg and a wound in his chest. He tries to sleep and the rest of the time he just gazes.

I won't be able to walk for a long time, but when I see Jack and Joe and sense the deathly stillness of the fellow with the spinal wound below me, I think I'm lucky.

I haven't been out of a war zone for seven years, but I don't think I ever really knew how the soldier felt until I was wounded and had to lie on the battlefield alone and in pain, as so many have done before me.

What soldiers feel in these moments I realize, and what they feel now I know. One of them, a lightly wounded, came into my bunk a little while ago, and he said: "I'm so goddam mad I'm never going to believe a radio commentator or newspaperman again."

"What have I done now?" I said.

"Oh, not you, you're just a dumb guy who gets himself wounded. But I just heard the radio say that correspondents report that the Italians lit up the beach for us and we stormed ashore under cover of a heavy bombardment against the Germans, and everything looked like Coney Island."

I got mad, too, and I'm still so mad I feel like crying. When people conspire to make a show out of war, when they try to conceal the suffering in war, then that's what makes the soldier suffer most of all.

THERE IS STILL
TIME TO DIE

TIME is flowing by and I am going back into battle. My life, more than that of anyone I know, has been spent in lonely wanderings among the dreary wastelands of war. It is not that I have known as much of war in as intense form as hundreds of thousands of others; for I have not. It is that, having landed ten years ago as a destitute vagabond upon the shores of China, I was plunged into the middle of an alien nation's war, reeling down across the continent with beaten and defeated soldiers, living with them, for them, but never, never once, being of them. It is that venturing out of China into Burma, and being driven from that land through the jungles into India, and then marching across the African desert with victory into Europe—it is that with these armies, never carrying a gun, never knowing the common purpose of murder, always standing apart even from the ambitions and duties of my own American soldiers—it is because of this that I say I have spent a life of solitude in the midst of war. What I have known and learned of war cannot therefore be what the soldier learns and knows, no matter how hard I try. I propose, nevertheless, to describe not all I have learned of war but what in the few brief hours left to me comes running on the heels of memory into mind.

I was born into the world of war abruptly, without knowledge of it, either by reading or any other manner, without theory and without any well-defined preconceptions, by the way of battle. I learned about war, like the soldier, if he ever learns about war, not from tracing its course down from society through government to the battlefield but by following it tortuously up from the battlefield to government and to society. This is the hard and long way to learn about war, I do not deny. But it had one advantage. Whatever theory I have developed is grounded well in practice, and not the other way around. Being brought up in war this way, I have never forgotten the actual as well as the philosophic primacy of Being over Thinking.

I was nurtured in war by defeat. My daily existence was simply

that of putting one foot ahead of the other, while keeping my eyes peeled over my shoulder for the blood-seeking thing that was hissing on the trail behind. I knew retreats not just as a pulling back in the night. No, I knew them as mad, chaotic routs, with thousands of soldiers roiling the roads and millions of peasants moving south and struggling ever westward.

I never knew a victory. Sometimes the wind of rumor brought word of one. But when I went there to see, there was always only the word "defeat"; and we were on the road again, moving south and westward, always going—back—back—back—until it seemed there never would be an end of it.

Victory! The very word became a lie and vanished from the language. The Chinese people used it only as a gambling term and not as a possible condition of battle. So the government had to invent a new phrase for the opposite of defeat, that the people in their bitter cynicism could understand. They called it—oh, distant irony!—they called it "final victory." What a world of patience was in that phrase. "Fight to the final victory." They painted it in letters six feet high on mud houses, on loess caves and on city walls. In the ever-present hell, of the ever-tortured, living moment, that was the distant Paradise, the Eldorado in the clouds, the green oasis that shimmered like a mirage in the desert of defeat. How far, far the journey and long, long the years away it was.

Compared with the Chinese, of course, I am a novice, but I believe I know more about defeat and retreat than almost any living American. In saying this, I am merely stating a fact, though I realize it may sound like arrogance or vanity. But before anyone jumps to that conclusion, let him consider how strange it would be to boast of defeat. The surest cure for arrogance, the surest way to lose your self-confidence is to be defeated—not once, but many times. For, more than any other men, those who live in the atmosphere of defeat are always the victims of self-doubt. For a man defeated is like a virgin raped. The inviolability of the soul has been shattered and can never be repaired again. On the roads, crowded with the soldiers of the beaten army, shameful feelings of inferiority and guilt will rise up to corrupt your self-confidence and to poison the roots of your soul. And it seems to you, perhaps, I do not know, as it seems to that woman who is struggling against the man who would violate her, that to struggle any more would be futile, that perhaps the embrace of the enemy would not be so horrible and unpleasant if

you could only get it over and done with and rest from all this violence.

As you contemplate the corpse-strewn road moving slowly beneath your blistered feet and look with the glazed eye of exhaustion into the bleakness of the mountains where your retreat is leading you, you feel your strength ebbing away, your power gone, and before you stretch long years of utter, desolate hopelessness. It is too hard, and not to be endured. And your soul cries out in protest: "I cannot."

All this hideous doubt, despair and defeated confusion of the soul a soldier in continual retreat must know, for everywhere in the image of the army around him are mirrored the signs of his helplessness—the thinned ranks, the lost legions, the battered, shattered equipment, and everywhere the once good earth vanishing, fleeing behind him. Everything is lost, ruined, hopeless. Everything seems to be passing away: the army, the earth, life itself, eternal values—all are dying. It seems to him that all is past redemption, that he is ruined, the army done for, the nation dead.

I say these things are so, for I have known them in the dark loneliness of my own soul, and I have seen and felt and known them in the troubled confusion of others. In those days of everlasting defeat and retreat in China, I felt fettered in a world of oppression and held captive in a spell of doubt.

Then, suddenly, one day, for no apparent reason, my faith and the faith of thousands of others returned in a tidal flood. This faith did not spring from any leader; it did not leap out of Chiang Kai-shek, like Athena springing whole-bodied from Zeus's head; it welled up from below, springing from the people, as it always must. And strange, it rose not from any sudden, surprising victory on the battlefield, but from the very heart of defeat itself. In this statement there is no paradox whatever. For rooted in the soul of tragedy there lies a strong and melancholy joy. It is the joy that knows that nothing can be worse and feels its own power to withstand anything that life can bring.

Just where, when or how this feeling was born I cannot say. Perhaps it came from the realization that no matter how much land was lost, there were always still hundreds of miles in which to retreat. Perhaps it slowly crept into the people's and the army's consciousness that the retreats were no longer so swift, sudden and chaotic as they once had been: gradually the advance of the enemy was slow-

ing down. Or maybe it came from the realization that one could escape the enemy merely by dodging to the sides of the railways and highways and settling down on the land again. And then this faith, born out of hatred and springing into anger, may have risen from the knowledge that even were there no army, still the people could fight for their homes, land and lives.

Wherever it came from and however it was born, the faith was there, and a people had found its soul. There could be no question of victory. That was far, far away. That victory might never come. What had sprung up with jubilant and invincible power, bursting all the old walls of doubt and negation, was a feeling of brooding and implacable patience. Made miraculously whole again and secure in the incorruptibility of their own soul, a race had learned the lesson that "there is always still time to die."

That was the first important, and perhaps it still is the greatest, thing I learned from war. No one—I apply the lesson to individuals as well as states—if the sought-for goal be worth while, should surrender until the last supreme effort has been made, until the final breath of energy, ambition and courage has been expended and no more can be done. You think the lesson is easy, but you do not know. It is easy in the copy books, and tales of resolution, when they are done and accomplished, make fine maxims for children, but in the doing they are hard.

The Chinese were secure in the knowledge that they had met the ordeal and for the time being, at least, had conquered—conquered their desperation and self-doubt, the fear that they might not be able to carry on the struggle. But all around them, empty, hollow men, with seductive voices, tried to lure them on to peace. After Nanking had fallen and been raped, a British newspaper spokesman for the Foreign Office,—secure in the confines of Shanghai,—counseled—it was the counsel of hollow desperation—the Chinese, now that they had saved their honor, to come to terms. "What is the use of this unequal struggle?" the paper demanded. And a columnist for the American-owned *Shanghai Evening Post and Mercury*, for which—blast his Old China Hand heart—he still writes, with the sound and bitter reasoning of the vested interests, castigated the Chinese for raising the banner of guerrilla warfare. "It will only bring reprisals down on the people," he said.

And the final bitter seed of treacherous friends and appeasement, encouragement from any quarter to give some easement to her tor-

tured soul, when after sixteen long, weary months of labor she lost the Yangtze Valley, splitting the heart of her country, when she was in the act of abandoning Hankow, when she tried to destroy the city so that the Japanese would have no base from which to work, when she placed dynamite in Japanese buildings and set fire to the Japanese Concession, when workers scrawled on the buildings and on the walls bitter messages of derision—"Ha! Little men, do you think to conquer this great country!"—for the incoming Japanese to see and ponder—when all this was done and the nation was committed to the bitter harvest of scorched earth, then, from the little understanding and faith in their hearts, Occidental officials and soldiers cut the wires leading to the dynamited buildings, dumped the explosives in the Yangtze River and turned hoses on the fires which the Chinese had not scrupled to set to their own buildings. Let the Russians be thankful that there were no British and Americans in Moscow in 1812; for undoubtedly they would have saved the city for Napoleon, so little do these men of puny souls understand the gigantic force of a people going forth to meet its destiny.

Why was it that I, a mere vagrant tramp with little to recommend me to the notice of other human beings, could still from the depth of my ignorance understand the war in China better than the foreign diplomats and the pseudo-military observers? I think it was because I was closer to the pulse beat of China. I knew that the pulse still beat on, that the body had not yet grown cold. I had assimilated, not with my eyes, but with my heart and mind.

The months passed, and still China was being defeated. Little by little I was led to question why. It had seemed to me and to the defeated generals, telling their tale of a lost battle, that every operation might have ended differently had the luck been a little better. In every case, reinforcements that could have turned the tide of battle, just failed to arrive in time, or peasant traitors led the Japanese through impregnable mountains by little-known passes, or a division commander at the crucial moment failed to obey an order. After a while, when my expectant hopes of victory were one upon another smashed on the rocks of battle, it came to me full flood that the recurrent nature of these seemingly accidental incidents could not be put down to the blind confluence of mischance alone. So I began my search backward from the battlefield for the reasons why reinforcements failed to arrive on time, why the peasants acted as guides to the Japanese and why orders were frequently disobeyed or ignored.

I found that reinforcements never could arrive on time because of the state of the railways, the dearth of roads and the lack of transport; that peasants acted as guides for the Japanese because they did not see or believe that their individual fortunes were bound up with the outcome of the war; that division commanders often ignored orders because, like feudal lords, they were afraid if they lost their troops, they would no longer be commanders. So back from the battlefield, my pursuit of knowledge led me to government to society and its forces. I had to find why China had not been industrialized while Japan had, why landlords and their sons were not drafted into the army while tenant farmers and agrarian lumpen proletarians were, why commanders based their moves on personal relationships and not on strictly military procedure. Naturally, I was led into a study of agrarian economy and the social forces that exist within the womb of that economy, and that led me—I was only following the trail where inevitable facts stood up like bold signposts—to the Chinese Revolution. And so I came to world diplomacy, to Western imperialism, to world economy and at last to the heart of the whole anarchic, rotten social order of this universe, concealed, palsied over and polluted by the double talk of statesmen, the loud and lying legends of the newspapers and the cynical and brutal mendacities of the overseers of money and privilege.

To the reader this road to knowledge may sound broad and direct, but for me it was a narrow road with many turnings. And to the guerrilla bands with their bird rifles, the trail from their mountain lair, to the landlord's home, to the town merchant, to the city banker, to the treaty-port compradore, to the foreign merchantman, to H. H. Kung and T. V. Soong and Chiang Kai-shek, to Tokyo, London and Washington is a very long and devious trail, indeed.

This knowledge did not come to me all at once. It soaked in drop by drop, seeping down like a slow and bitter poison through the pores of my soul. Young, and with my emotions frayed to a raw and ragged fringe, I could not fight it off. All I knew was that I was exhausted from my searching, that something had corrupted and taken away my strength and filled my bowels with the "gray substance of shuddering impotence." I could not work, for all was false and futile. I could not write, for I had never learned how. I could not think, for I was wrung out and exhausted. So I lay in occupied Shanghai, penniless, lonely, done in.

Then slowly the pendulum began to swing. After a while the world came in again. It flooded in upon the tide of terror, murder and betrayal that was then sweeping Shanghai like a fire. It came at first in the shape of morbid interest in the gang wars, the gambling palaces and the garish, open and unashamed opium parlors. Then it came with a swift flash of terror in the barking Mausers, the friends fallen dead in the streets and the men and women kidnaped, tortured and returned to circulation wrecked, broken traitors.

In the cold blue light of this creeping menace, how could I remain quiet and inactive, or sick and unaroused? I had in the past been pursued by foreign intermediaries of the Japanese, with promises of large sums of money, to tell all I knew about the formation and the distribution of the Chinese armies and the names of guerrilla leaders in the vicinity of Shanghai. But never had I felt with such a nearness the breath of something unclean and foul as I did then. I saw and watched with a sense of horrified fascination how the very intermediary who had wanted me to turn information over to the Japanese now posed as a friend of Chinese guerrillas and lured them with the promise of guns into the International Settlement and then betrayed them to the Japanese.

I saw the one person in Shanghai who, from his small-salaried pittance, had supported me when I was half-starved set upon by thugs, shot down and killed. I saw a girl, a girl I first had met outside the bolted gates of Peiping the day the city fell, a girl who had organized the young women of occupied Shanghai against the Japanese—I saw her betrayed by her own best friend, then kidnaped and finally returned to home, her body a checkerboard of cigarette burns and her soul one compressed, tight-lipped scream. And at last, the Chinese writer who first had led me into the guerrilla areas behind the enemy's lines, he, who out of playful affection and in his native tongue called me "son"—I saw him one day, just after taking leave of his wife and child, and when walking on the street, knowing that he was a marked man, yet walking boldly to his office—I saw this man shot in the neck and then pursued by Chinese puppet gunmen as he coolly fled through the streets of Frenchtown. When he miraculously escaped and lived, I disguised him in a priest's robe, and thus, with a Latin Bible, which he could not read, in his hand, he departed the terror of Shanghai.

In this way, through murdered and betrayed friends, and from the midst of a gang war that was as serious and deadly as any war on

the battlefield, it came to me that I had work to do. Though I was an alien and was not of it and scarcely ever could be of it, yet it seemed to me that in that time and place I had the duty to trace down and record the terror. I will not describe by what hard and devious methods I, a penniless man, in a trade where bribery, corruption and money talks the loudest, came to know what I knew. Although I discovered that terror is a slimy, fascinating, dangerous business. In my investigations I was as coldly factual as could be; for it was not a trade where the quality of sentiment was of value. There were stories—hundreds of them—that anyone could hear at any time and place, but it was not the stories for which I searched. It was for documents, records, coded notes and telegrams, all of which the terror organizations kept like some big business house.

From such sources as these, I learned about the Japanese Special Service Section, dread organ of the army for making conquest pay for further war. I came to know the Chinese Secret Service, which, like an all-pervading essence, moved everywhere, threatening, coercing, terrorizing men and women to stay behind the national cause and killing, where they would not. I learned that the Japanese wielded their instrument of terror like a clumsy, brutal wagon tongue, but the Chinese flashed through the society of occupied China like a rapier, intriguing, bribing, dancing in to kill and weaving away again.

I learned the facts and figures of the Japanese Army's alliance with big business in this game of corruption and terror; how the Mitsui Company bought, sold and controlled the rights of the trade in opium, which they shipped in steamers and in railway trains from Manchuria into the Yangtze Valley, where it was transhipped, packaged and sold under the threat of guns and with the protection of those gangs that had for a pittance already betrayed China; facts about the Special Service Section's amusement bureau, which sold for 1,000 dollars a night licenses to gambling palaces, each protected by fifty armed thugs; about the prostitution, pig-killing, garbage-removal, flag-selling monopolies, hideous graphs and charts of the Yellow Way society, and its propaganda section which lured Chinese on to be traitors, and the execution section which shot them with guns when and if they refused. And I learned how the Chinese, living in a world of codified plot and plan, discovered and killed traitors, then made good their escapes through all the underground

of bribery, corruption and hell-fire patriotism; just how they amassed dossiers on puppets, their daily lives, habits and friends, and how each and everyone might be employed in mutual assassinations. It was a picture of deep and dark Orientalism—a political underworld of which I had never dreamed, shocking beyond belief, but true as the terror which every war bears in its womb and spawns out on this bleeding world.

Thus it was through these crawling, lower forms of war that I came back into the world again—and I recognized at last, as I saw one man after another, old and young, rich and poor, voluntarily and against their will, dragged into the whirlpool of chaos and terror, that you cannot, no matter how much you wish, in turbulent times like these, stay out of the struggle and exist for yourself. You cannot sit on the fence. For a time you may get away with it, but sooner or later you will be dragged off on one side or the other. You have to choose. You are either for or against.

As I saw this and knew it for what it was, there came to me another realization. For while I knew that war in its closest, personal form—that of terror—forced people to take sides and declare themselves, yet I knew it was a tiny and subsidiary branch of war, springing from forces within free China itself. For it was a curious thing that while I was stumbling down the dark corridors of Shanghai's horrid mysteries, I came upon the fact that the little terrorists, the small-time gunmen, the bomb-throwers and the whole man-swarm of the gangs and the puppet armies—irresponsible men, receiving twenty and thirty Chinese dollars a month, and as much slaves of their masters as any feudal serf—I discovered that these men, often ignorant for whom or for what they worked, were but a part of those millions of peasants heaved up in dissolution and poverty by the war. Behind everything lay that gray, engulfing mass of 450,000,000 people. So, because of this, I went back into Free China.

During some months of absence, I now discovered, many changes had taken place. Free China was not so free as it looked from occupied China. I understood that the blockade, the loss of the industry in the coastal provinces, the burning of the cities, the flooding of the rivers, the tearing up of the railways and the highways, the creation of vast no-man lands where the good earth lay fallow—all these material factors of war, I understood, had driven with a violent impact upon the society of the China I once knew. In the light of fall-

ing production, there had been created a bestial struggle for existence, and men committed political suppression of every kind in the name of national liberation.

I tried, as well as a man working for a Shanghai news agency for twenty-five dollars a month and without the backing of those huge and important American newsgathering institutions which influence even Asiatic government officials can try, to swim counter to the flood of reaction, to protect with my pen those writers, artists, professors and students who were being sent to concentration camps, political reformatories or prisons.

It was, in the tide of fear and doubt corroding what to me once had been and still retained aspects of a noble war, a futile and certainly a thankless task. That I was followed everywhere I went, that my room was constantly searched and rifled, that I was called pro-Japanese or Communist, depending on the political color of the listener to whom these defamers told their stories—none of that really mattered in the light of very real suffering that was being endured by others. Yet, under the heel of a janissary censorship, dictated not by what was true, progressive or of military necessity but by the censors' fear of those in power above, there was little that I could do.

The sight of this paralysis creeping over China and my inability to do anything about it gave me a sense of deep frustration, but it did not unnerve me and take away all my strength as it might have done in my younger years. There was always a way to escape the "Great Black Rear," and close at hand was the refuge of the Chinese people and the democratic front line.

To such a refuge, like an outcast seeking solace, I went. For many months I wandered across China, talking and living with peasants and tenant farmers, poor slaves of an outworn and dead semifeudal land system. I did not go to them with a poetic eye held open for their suffering, but with a cold eye on the search for the facts of their impoverishment and the reasons behind it. In the statistics of their land rentals, the 60 to 100 per cent of their rice and wheat handed over in fee to the landlord, in the figures of taxes paid, of army grain requisitions, of unpaid hours given to the government for scorching the earth, carrying ammunition and digging trenches, of sons taken off to war, in the facts of refugees sold like so many cattle into the army for fifty, sixty and seventy dollars, depending on the health of the victim—in all these hard, adamant facts, told amid burnt-out and blackened villages, in mountains, where the people

were reduced to eating roots, and on the great, battle-scarred plains, anywhere and everywhere, I heard and felt and saw the most, abysmal tale of suffering, bleak, dark, unrelieved misery and blackest corruption and oppression that I ever knew.

The overwhelming nature of this hideous mass hopelessness might have been enough to drown me in a torrent of despair had it not, at that time been for one thing. It was, as of old, the peasant soldiers who restored my faith in China.

As I came wandering down across the Yellow River plain, through the mountains to the Yangtze gorges, I came upon a Chinese division in the midst of launching an attack against the Japanese-held river port of Ichang. The attack was delivered with such cunning and dispatch that it would have succeeded but for one thing: the Japanese used gas. When I saw the Chinese soldiers rolling in agonized pain on the ground, with mustard-gas blisters big as tennis balls on their arms, legs and backs, when I saw and heard them moaning and crawling over the earth to succor each other and when I thought how without planes, guns, tanks or gas masks they had delivered their assault into the face of—this—then I knew that, despite the corruption, the treachery and the malevolent suppression, this race of people concealed within them a simple nobleness beyond all telling.

I am used to coming back from the simple glory of the front lines to the complicated and blasé atmosphere of the rear, so that I cushion myself beforehand for an emotional letdown. But that autumn, shortly before Pearl Harbor, when I returned to Chungking and heard American officers, bitterly cynical because their little-boy legend of China did not agree, now that they had seen it, with the fact of China—when I heard these officers say to me that the Chinese Army had never fought, I was overcome with feelings of contempt and hatred for their lack of perspective and their arrogance. When Pearl Harbor came and I went down into Burma and saw American officers, in action for the first time, bewildered by the atmosphere of real war and politics, caught in feelings of self-doubt and enervated by the suddenness of the thing that had hit them, I did not sneer, as they had done at the Chinese Army; for I knew most of us have to learn by experience and we all have to become emotionally acclimated to war.

After nine years in China, years when the many facets of war became the heart and core of my life, to be plunged into a world of

almost make-believe war in Burma was a shocking experience. From it I learned little of positive value. I indicated as much in a book I wrote about the Burma campaign. I stick to the main conclusions of that book. The Burma War was a sham and a farce. Imperialism and colonialism, no matter how paternalistic and civilized, is an oppressive and a rotten system. And the representatives of it, in this historic epoch, are but caricatures of what in another time and age were Kipling heroes.

When I came out of Burma, I also emerged from the higher realms of war; for I was plunged back onto the battlefield again. In marching across Africa with the Eighth Army, the best and most cohesive force I had seen, and in assaulting Sicily and Italy with the Americans, I found amid the barren horror of battle little time to think about the war. Yet here and there through the murky atmosphere of combat, the war would intrude itself. It came in short visits to the rear, in the words of a general, or in the hurt and dumb look of a Sicilian peasant.

Everywhere was oppression of the people—and fear. In Algiers, that stronghold of American democracy, the buildings were posted with signs warning men of the dangers of a revolution. It was an attempt to frighten the colonial bureaucracy with the specter of the people—the people of France, taking power into their own hands. Everywhere was hypocrisy and falsehood. On the correspondents' bulletin board in Algiers I saw a notice posted there by the authorities: "There will be no more political censorship." It was a lie. Should you write a message that dealt in any but the official American-British version of events, more often than not, when tracing it down, you would find it streaked with many marks of blue, and penciled with the legend, "as censored by Mr. Murphy." Should you question that august personage, that representative of the mighty American state, he would blandly assure you: "There is no political censorship."

So even though I was much of the time embroiled in battle, the larger world of war sometimes intruded itself into my consciousness. After I was wounded, General Eisenhower in his farewell conference with correspondents said one of the reasons for the slowness of the Italy campaign was that the Italians had not rendered us as much help as had been expected. When I read these words, I remembered how the workers of Rome had gathered in the streets the night Mussolini fell and shouted: "Long live Matteotti!" They had not

yelled: "Long live the King!" or "Long live Badoglio." No, from the depths of the past, and out of the bleak years of Fascism, they had summoned the ghost of a socialist idea. They had shouted not for kings and "liberal" Fascists but for themselves. In the light of that, and in the light of a defeated army, veering toward the left, how—how in the name of politics—could we expect zealous support from the mass of the Italians? But did we want the active support of the masses, or just the upper crust? No, I thought at the time, under those conditions, if I were an Italian soldier, a worker or a farmer, I should not stick my head out to support either the German Army or the Allied force. I would say: "The hell with you both," and save my life, energy and whatever organization I had to struggle at a more appropriate time for a more worth-while object.

Taken off the battlefield and out of war by my wound, I was sent to America. I was going back for rest, for oblivion, to the land where I was born, the land which I had left ten years before as a merchant seaman. Many times during the blot and blur of battle and the pain of war I had thought of it with intense longing, as men in an alien land always long for the memory-haunted scenes of home. Many times I had conjured up dreams of the jungle streets of Brooklyn, of the luring lights of Broadway, Ebbets Field on a Sunday afternoon, and well-dressed women flashing down Fifth Avenue. Then at last came the day when I lay on deck in my stretcher and gazed on the sky line of New York, rising like Camelot through the mists. It was November, and I breathed in the smoke and sharp air and felt, like Odysseus, that I had conquered fate and it was fine, but wondrous strange, to be home again.

After the long and tormented years of war and with the need to give some rest to my exhausted soul, it was at first like a dream fulfilled to lie in a hospital bed and surrender myself to coddling and care. For days there was the wonderful thrill of reexploring forgotten but long untasted foods and filling up on such simple things as eggs, milk and fruit. There was the excitement of the free press, with its bold and violent criticisms, the glorious sense of reading something that could not be suppressed, the moving experience of talking in a loud, unguarded tone, without peering through the window to see if anyone was listening there, and simple quiet and the knowledge of being temporarily free from the murderous suppression and the slamming racket of war—all these were mine and for a few days I was wealthy in the possession of them.

Then it happened. Little by little the other world of America came into my hospital room. At first, it came in with the newspapers, in a sentence by a columnist or some editorial remark. Sometimes it came through the door with visitors, revealing itself in the giggle of a girl at the wrong time, the harsh expression of an acquaintance who believed I was in agreement with him.

After a while, however, it drove in on me like a flood, from the headlines in the newspapers, from the columns, from the editorials. I don't know why I had never seen it before, unless my wish for an unadulterated, happy land, had blotted it from my vision. This thing—the thing that I abhorred—it was in this country, too. That the people didn't care about the war—that I expected. That they would seek surcease in a whirlpool of pleasure—that I believed was normal; for I am not like those men who, having had a few whiffs of cannon smoke, believe they have a right to rage against the natural relaxation of the people at home; for I know they, too, can be frustrated and lonely. But that other thing—I am no child, and I knew it was here, but to see it so bold, so loud, so repellent and so widespread—for that I was not quite prepared. Even in the hospital, I sensed that it was everywhere. It was a nurse who raged against the Jews, Rankin talking of “kikes” while the Senate laughed; an official, hiding behind the cloak of anonymity, attacking Labor for an imaginary disruption of a deal with an already corrupted government of a Balkan country; almost the whole metropolitan press baiting Labor, the one organized force in America that had opposed Fascism before Pearl Harbor; it was the slamming discrimination against the Negroes in the South, the soldier-vote fraud, the hysterical demagoguery of Congress; it was the Neanderthal editorial writers screaming in the tones of insane monkeys that the Japanese were not members of the human race; the general who demanded that Tokyo be razed to the ground; and the well-bred Mr. Grew, with his country-club democracy, slyly insinuating that we keep the emperor in power in Japan.

When I heard and read these things, my heart was torn asunder, and from its opened depths gushed up a stream of bitter memories. For when I read Mr. Grew's statement, curiously, there came forth into my consciousness, in all their complicated convolutions, a group of Chinese written characters that formed one of the most potent slogans of the China War. Came back, too, the memory of bare-foot Chinese soldiers, with haggard but fervent faces, shouting against the bleak mountain walls the words of that slogan: “Down with

Emperor Country Ideology!" "Down with Fascist Japan!" I saw again, too, the hard, face of a Japanese soldier, who had deserted his army to join Chinese guerrillas, intent on destroying the whole, stunning myth of emperor worship, yelling that slogan with as much ardor as the rest. Now to see an ambassador advocating what was tantamount to the betrayal—I use the word advisedly—of not only the crushed Japanese masses but the Chinese people, as well, was a harsh and disillusioning thing.

So it was, after ten years of wandering and war, that I was furnished proof of what I had known for a long time, that the world was all of one piece, that America, like all the rest, was sick with a "dread world-sickness of the soul."

I believe that America, because she was a wealthy country, is getting her Fascism late. I believe this country is pregnant with reaction. I hope the birth of Fascism here will be abortive. I see no guarantee that it will be. I believe it must be fought.

I think there are men in this country in business, in government and in the army who are just like men in other countries in business, in government and in the army. And I think they do not give two cents for the people.

I believe that a good part of America is trying to travel down atavistic paths. Already, I hear the Middle West talking of isolationism, writers talking of Pan-Americanism, businessmen talking of free trade, industrialists thinking of nothing but reconversion, or—more frightening—of the "American Century." I see soldiers longing to come back to the country as it was before. I read letters from them begging people not to change a thing. Everywhere people are turning to the lost world of yesterday, the world that was never as good as it seems now. Everyone seeks the lost home of his childhood. But "you can't go home again." You can only go forward.

I believe if America tries to keep going backward, she will come in conflict with the rest of the world. I think the people of war-roiled Asia and Europe don't want to go back to yesterday, they want to go on to tomorrow.

I believe in the long run these people will go on. I believe they will get what they are seeking. It may not come in my lifetime, but it will come in the lifetime after mine, or the one after that. But I will fight for it to come in my lifetime.

I do not believe in any immediate better world after the war. I do not think Churchill, Roosevelt, Stalin or Chiang Kai-shek will get us a better world. I think a better world is where a free-thinking

people controls its own destiny, and I think it can only be obtained by the people. I believe in the peasants of China, in the Partisans of Yugoslavia, in the underground of France. I believe in farmers and workers everywhere. I do not believe in the falsehoods, the shams and the deceptions of the statesmen, the generals and the "leaders." I do not believe that if we only had a number of good people, the world would roll smoothly on its axis. I do not believe in good people ruling us, but only in the mass of the people ruling themselves.

I see a period of bitter confusion, recriminations and despair after the war. I believe the people of Europe will never forgive us if we try to plant any more phoney governments on them. I hope we shall not try. But I believe the people will overthrow these governments if we do.

I believe there may be a period of defeat for the people of Asia, Europe and America, too, after the war. I believe that we may all be lost, but I believe we shall be found. And this belief, I think, rests on the discovery of a new democracy—not an American democracy but a world democracy. I think nothing—neither Fascism, imperialism, colonialism, Americanism nor anything else—must halt the search for that democracy.

I think, in the search for this democracy, the people of the world may suffer crushing reverses. I believe we may all be forced again into retreat. And I believe that I and many others with me may be forced once more to contemplate the road running back beneath our blistered feet and to look with exhausted eyes upon the bleakness of the mountains. But this time I, for one, shall not cry out in protest: "I cannot." I shall say: "I can."

Time is flowing by now and I am going back into battle. I am drugged with danger and excitement and I cannot move. And I hear, far off, buzz-saw roar of the planes and feel the quick shiver of the earth and the obliterating crash of shells. I sense my power wasting drop by drop from me while the battle rages, and all my life is one violent blot again. Yet, while the youthful fires die, the old avowals stand—and we who were defeated are victorious and we who retreated advance again. Chinese soldier, heroic friend, blood-brother of my misery, come to me as once you came in my youth. Come to me in the dark and secret recesses of the mountains. Come to me on the bloody, corpse-strewn road. Come to me out of the heart of defeat, bringing the old implacable patience, the deathless hope, the confidence that says: "There is always still time to die."

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